THE
UNITARIANS
HENRY GOW

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THE FAITHS

VARIETIES OF CHRISTIAN EXPRESSION

Edited by L. P. JACKS
M.A., LL.D.

THE UNITARIANS

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BY

HENRY GOW, M.A., D.D.

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TO

MY WIFE

EDITOR'S PREFACE

A WORD of explanation seems to be needed in regard to the title and the sub-title which have been chosen for this series.

There is *one* faith, says St. Paul; but the title of the series indicates more than one. A difficulty unquestionably exists at that point. It has not been overlooked.

Had the promoters of this series adopted the former point of view and called it "the Faith" instead of "the Faiths", they would have answered in advance an important question which the series itself should be left to answer. But, equally, by calling the series "the Faiths", instead of "the Faith", have they not prejudged the question in another way?

Of the two positions the latter seemed the less dogmatic. Let us take the world as we find it, in which the Faiths show themselves as a plurality, and then, if they are really one, or many varieties of the same, or if only one is true and the rest false, let the fact appear from the accounts they give of themselves.

On no other terms could full liberty have been accorded to the writers who contribute to the series; on no other terms could the task of editing the series be fairly carried out. It would have been obviously

unfair to demand of each of the contributors that he should exhibit the faith that is in him as ultimately identical with the faith that is in each of his fellow-contributors. It would have been obviously unfair to deny to any contributor the right to exhibit his own faith as the only true faith and all the rest as false. It would have been obviously unfair to assume that faith is necessarily singular because St. Paul so describes it. For the degree of authority to be attributed to the words of St. Paul is precisely one of the points on which the contributors to the series must be allowed to differ and to speak for themselves.

The same considerations apply to the sub-title of the series—"Varieties of Christian Expression". It may be that Christianity has only *one* mode of expression, and that it ceases to be Christianity when expressed in any other way. But to take that for granted would ill become the editor of such a series as this, and it would become him still worse if he deliberately planned the series so as to lead up to that conclusion. Again we must take the world as we find it. Among those who claim to be Christians many varieties of expression unquestionably exist which may or may not be only different ways of expressing the same original truth. So far as the editor is concerned this must be left an open question. If to some writers in the series it should seem good to deny the name of Christian to those whose modes of expression differ from their own, they must not be precluded from doing so, and the reader will judge for himself between the claim and the counter-claim. Certainly

the hope is entertained that from the presentation of differences in this series there may emerge some unities hitherto unsuspected or dimly seen; but that will be as it may. The issue is not to be forced.

To present a complete logical justification of our title and sub-title is perhaps not possible, and such justification as we have here offered will probably commend itself only to the pragmatic mind. But objections taken to these titles will be found on examination to be objections to the series itself. How, we might ask, can any earnest and eminent Christian, believing his own variety of Christian expression to be better than the rest, logically justify his co-operation, in such a series as this, with other earnest and eminent Christians whose beliefs in that matter run counter to his own? None the less they are here co-operating.

That such co-operation has been found possible may be reckoned one of the signs of the times. The explanation of it lies, not in logic, but in charity.

L. P. JACKS

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THE aim of this book is to show that Unitarianism is not, as is sometimes supposed, mainly negative and critical, but that it is a development out of orthodoxy under the influence of a belief in the freedom of the spirit in its worship and in its search for truth. Most Unitarians would agree with some words of Lord Haldane's in the *Hibbert Journal* for January 1928 :—

"There may be great divergence of belief about the Gospel narrative. But there is none about the presence of God in the soul, or about the tremendous significance of the teaching of Christ."

No one can speak authoritatively for all Unitarians, seeing that they have no binding creed to be expounded, no Articles of Faith to be explained. I can only trace in outline something of their history, and give my impressions of their thought and spirit.

It is a most difficult problem for all Liberal Christians to whom the Bible, and especially the Gospels, are no longer wholly true, to define the relation of the free spirit to History. How far do we depend for our religion on the past? How far ought we to depend upon the past? What has the Jesus of History to say to us? With what authority does he speak to us? It is surely certain that reason and conscience and the personal experience of religion through prayer and communion, and through love

and sorrow and suffering, are not, and ought not to be, independent of the past. As Dr. Martineau says in his *Types of Ethical Theory*, "I cannot rest contentedly upon the past: I cannot take a step towards the future without its support".

A philosophy of revelation in History is a great need for all Liberal Christians who accept modern Biblical criticism, and at the same time look at the Bible with deep reverence, and at the life and teaching of Jesus Christ in a spirit of humble discipleship. Everyone must feel the value of the Bible as great religious literature, but its value as revelation in History, what Baron von Hügel calls "its factual happenings", is very difficult to define. Such a subject is beyond the scope of this book. But it must be recognized that Liberal Christianity, while unable to accept the dogmatic authority of the Bible for life or thought, does not attempt to live and think by reason and conscience and its own religious experience alone. The Bible has no mere sentimental value for it as a fading relic of the past. It finds God in History, and above all in certain great moments and personalities in History, as well as in present experiences. The philosophical justification for such reverence and dependence upon Jesus is outside the purpose of this book, but for most Unitarians, as for other Liberal Christians, that reverence and that sense of the centrality of Jesus remain not merely unspoiled by Biblical criticism, but even deepened and purified.

H. GOW

March 1928

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THE UNITARIANS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

SPORADIC Unitarianism is to be found from the first age of Christianity. Heretical thinkers who denied that the doctrine of the Trinity is taught in the Bible appeared from time to time, but there is no one outstanding thinker from whom Unitarian thought is derived and from whose initiation a continuous development can be traced.

Neither can we find any Unitarian Church in patristic or medieval times. There was no community of Christian worshippers for whom Jesus was simply an ideal of human goodness and love, a teacher of the way of life, and a revealer of the will of God. For the Jewish Christian he was the Messiah, about whom all the Prophets and Psalmists had written. The Messiah was certainly not God, but he was certainly also more than an ideal of human goodness and a teacher of the way of life. The early Jewish Christian community cannot be described as Unitarian in the sense of regarding Jesus as a very great Prophet and nothing more.

For the Pauline Church, Christ was a divine Being who had pre-existed through all time, by whom the world was made, and who was manifested in the fullness of time to bring salvation to men by his death and resurrection. Although much of St. Paul's Gospel is

capable of being re-interpreted in a sense which enables Unitarians to accept it, and although it may be admitted his conception of Christ is not always consistent with itself, still, it is clear that St. Paul's Christ was much more than a very great Prophet who taught the way of life and who revealed God's will to men.

For Johannine Christianity, Christ was still more definitely the Incarnation of God. He was the eternal divine Power through whom God made the world and in whom God showed to man His own nature. He was one with God. To know Christ was to know God. Here again, perhaps even more than in the case of St. Paul's Christology, it is possible for Unitarians to feel fundamental agreement with the underlying mysticism of the Johannine Gospel. Human love and goodness are indeed a revelation of God: wherever love is, God is. The divine and the human are not two distinct and separate ideas. The divine is realized most deeply when incarnate in the human.

Unitarians certainly do not reject the Pauline or Johannine conception of Christ as without value. They would say that they contained much which was not based on historical fact, that Jesus of Nazareth was not the Christ of St. Paul or St. John, but they recognize in St. Paul's doctrine of the Atonement and in St. John's doctrine of the Incarnation that they are in contact with profound thought and life-giving experiences. At the same time it is clear that St. John's Christ was much more than a very great Prophet who taught the way of life and who revealed God's will to men.

There may have been some small early sects for whom Jesus was mainly man, but the whole tendency of Christian thought was against them, and they were soon stamped out and forgotten.

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Neither Jewish Christianity, nor that of St. Paul, nor that of St. John, could be described as definitely Trinitarian. Indeed, it might be argued with much probability that if any reader came to these books without having heard anything of the later doctrine of the Trinity, the idea of the Trinity would never occur to him in connection with their teaching.

If he accepted all the books of the New Testament as of equal value and truth, he would find himself in a state of considerable mental confusion between the different conceptions of Jesus Christ presented to him in the Synoptic Gospels and in the Pauline Epistles and in St. John and in the Epistle to the Hebrews and in the Book of Revelation. He would not find, any more than a modern Unitarian is able to find, a consistent conception of the nature or origin or purpose of Jesus Christ. He would see that even in the Synoptics there are stories about Christ and sayings ascribed to Christ which suggest that he was more than man, and he would see this much more clearly in the rest of the New Testament, but it may well be doubted if the Athanasian doctrine of the Trinity or even the Nicene Creed would occur to him, or anything like them, if he had never heard of them before.

These Creeds have "developed", as it is said, out of the Scriptures, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the Church. That word "development" is capable of various interpretations, and is a dangerous word to use without clearly understanding what we mean by it. It may mean, and when used by orthodox Churchmen usually does mean, organic growth. Just as an acorn develops naturally and necessarily into an oak, so the doctrines of Christ in the New Testament develop necessarily and naturally into the Nicene Creed. Just

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as the oak is implicit in the acorn, so the Nicene Creed is implicit in the New Testament. It may be quite true that no one seeing an acorn would think of an oak if he had never seen an oak before, and that no one reading the New Testament would think of the Nicene Creed if he had never heard of its doctrines before, but the difference between the acorn and the oak and the New Testament and the Creeds is only a difference of growth. The one has developed organically out of the other.

This is the theory of Cardinal Newman in his doctrine of development, except that Newman laid the main stress on the ever-present guidance of the Spirit of God in His Church rather than on an inherent organic development. But it is by no means certain that human history, whether in the region of action or thought, can be justly explained through the category of organic growth. There may be other forms and modes of development. It is by no means certain that the development of a human being from infancy to maturity is exactly parallel to the development of an oak from an acorn. It is by no means certain that outward conditions and innate, implicit qualities explain the whole course of any human life. There may be other factors at work, such as the human will, or the *élan vital* or Providence. The element of mistake or failure or sin may enter into the development, and change its direction and lead it astray.

There may be an inherent tendency towards life and truth which is interfered with. The development may not be a mere unfolding according to predestined plan, the implicit becoming explicit, according to necessary laws. It may be that in man's history development may have in it an element of the inexplicable, and that what actually happens in deed or thought need not be regarded

as what ought to be. Human history for any one who believes in God, or for any one who believes that there is

> One far-off divine event
> To which the whole creation moves,

must mean movement, whether in the right or the wrong direction, which is controlled by a Tendency that makes for righteousness and truth, which interferes with movements in the wrong direction and encourages movements in the right direction. But we must recognize in human history that men often go a long way round when they might have gone straight forward, and that they often wander from the way.

To assert of the Nicene Creed that it is a development from the New Testament is by no means a proof that it is true, even if the New Testament were a consistent whole. It is still less likely to be true if the New Testament is recognized to be a congeries of different conceptions of Jesus which are by no means consistent with one another.

The history of early Christian doctrine is mainly concerned with the doctrine of the person of Christ. The ingenuities of thought displayed by these early Christians are amazing. They must not be regarded as mere mental aberrations or waste of time. They were a sincere attempt to understand the nature of God and to interpret the Christian Revelation in accordance with the best philosophical thought of their time. History was entirely subordinate to philosophy in their minds. There was no attempt at historical criticism. Amongst all the various sects and heresies the modern Unitarian view of the pure humanity of Jesus, based on a critical examination of the authority and historical value of the New Testament, found no place.

Unitarianism as a protest against the Trinity is to be found in early Christian history, but from the point of view of modern Unitarianism it is of little significance. Such writers as Paul of Samosata, Bishop of Antioch A.D. 260, and Sabellius, excommunicated from the Church of Rome about A.D. 217, promulgated heretical views of the Trinity and were promptly suppressed. Paul of Samosata thought Jesus was originally a man like other men, but that he gradually became divine, and finally was completely united with God.

Sabellius sought to preserve the Unity of God, and at the same time to make the mystery of the Trinity more easy to comprehend by teaching that the *one* God *manifested* Himself in three different ways, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is an attractive theory for those who want to retain orthodox language without accepting orthodoxy, and also for those who, while themselves unorthodox, want to interpret Trinitarian doctrines sympathetically. It is not difficult for a Unitarian to be a Sabellian and to conceive of God as Creator, revealing Himself in the Universe as Law, revealing Himself in human affections as Goodness and revealing Himself in conscience as a guide and comforter. This point of view enables any believer in God to call himself a Trinitarian, but it is, of course, entirely unorthodox and heretical.

The only important Christian movement which held its own against Trinitarianism in early Christianity was the Arian heresy. It is an extremely interesting movement, and it was for a time extremely popular. It was much more easy to understand than Trinitarianism, and it seemed to many to be much more reasonable and much more in accordance with the teaching of the Bible as a whole.

Arius was a presbyter of Alexandria in 318, and it was there that he began to teach his heresy. He taught that there is one God, supreme and eternal, and that He is alone, without equal. He has not been Father always. Before the world existed God created the Son. The Son originated in God only in so far as he has been created by God. He is in no sense of the substance or essence of God. He was the created instrument by whom all other creatures were to be created. He became incarnate in Jesus and truly took a human body, but he was not a man. He was a being capable of suffering, not an absolutely perfect being, which would have meant that he was God, but one who attains by effort absolute perfection.

Amongst the number of created Powers the Holy Ghost is to be placed beside the Son as a second independent substance. Arius, apparently, like his followers, considered the Holy Ghost as a being created by the Son and subordinate to him.

This was an attempt to avoid the Tritheism into which Trinitarianism so easily passes; it was an attempt to establish the eternal Unity and Supremacy of God, while allowing to Christ vast instrumental powers. Intellectually, it was easily understood and easily taught. It left the *work* of Christ unchanged, but it separated him fundamentally from God. It abolished mystery. It was early Rationalism—very imperfect Rationalism indeed, because this Rationalism adopted without questioning, not only everything in the New Testament, but also the orthodoxy of the second century. But it suffered from the defects of mere Rationalism. It made everything too clear, too definite: it made too absolute a distinction between God and man.

It is significant that a modern Unitarian, like

Martineau, confesses that his sympathies are with Athanasius against Arius, in their great controversy. He did not mean, assuredly, that he could approve the violence and intolerance of Athanasius, or that he agreed with his opinions, but as between the two he felt a deeper conception of God in Athanasius than in Arius. The division between man and God was absolute for Arius. It was a kind of early Deism, with Christ as a divine instrument, interposed. For Athanasius the revelation between God and Christ was one of inward unity, and this involved an inward unity with man. "The entire faith," says Harnack, "everything on which Athanasius staked his life, is described in the sentence 'God Himself has entered into humanity'." It was a theistic rather than a deistic view of God and man. It meant an immediate relation between the human and the divine. God, for Arius, stood outside and apart from the world. Christ and the Holy Ghost were subordinate Beings with whom alone man could come into contact. Whatever may be said against the Trinity as a true interpretation of the teaching of the New Testament, it did at least preserve as against Arianism the truth that God was *in* Christ, not merely had made Christ, and that to know the love of Christ was to know the love of God.

Arianism was the only heresy of a non-Trinitarian kind in early ages which produced for a time a flourishing and prosperous Church. After its defeat at the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople it turned its attention to missionary work amongst the barbarian Goths and Vandals. Even orthodox Christian historians admit the value of its work among the heathen. Both Salvian and Orosius praise the virtues of the Arian conquerors of Roman territory, and Augustine relates how moderately

the Visigothic Arians under Alaric treated the inhabitants of the city and what respect they showed for the sanctity of the Christian Churches. The long reign of the Arian Theodoric in Italy, and his impartial government, extort, as Milman remarks, "the praise of the most zealous Catholic".[1]

In the end the organization and learning of the Roman Church triumphed. Arianism was the creed of a less civilized and less united Church. The barbarians, in spite of their military vigour, were impressed with the grandeur and wisdom of Rome. They adopted the faith of their defeated foes, and henceforth, down to the time of the Reformation, Orthodox Trinitarianism reigned supreme.

[1] *Latin Christianity*, i, 384.

CHAPTER II

BIBLE RELIGION

WITH the Reformation the Bible became once again, as it had been in early Christianity, the basis of Theology. Protestants revered the Scriptures even more than St. Paul had revered the Old Testament or than Irenaeus or Tertullian had revered the New Testament. The Reformers had grown up in an atmosphere of authority. For many centuries Christianity had been supported by the authority of the Church. It was inconceivable that it could continue to exist in the absence of an infallible authority, and the Reformers were obliged, in questioning the absolute authority of the Church, to put another authority, equally absolute, in its place. Thus it came to pass that the Bible was set up in a position of authority, perhaps greater than it had ever had before. At the same time, united with the Bible worship, there was the dangerous and really incompatible principle of private judgement. It was the right of every man to read the Bible for himself and to find there, in accordance with his own reason and conscience, the scheme of salvation and the truths of religion. Apparently the Reformers expected that what the private man would find there would be identical with the old creeds, and that nothing would be given up except the claims of an infallible Pope and an infallible Church. The accretions of ecclesiasticism would be swept away, but the old doctrine of the work and nature of Christ and the doctrine of future rewards

and punishments would remain unchanged. The doctrine of Purgatory, which had involved such abuses in the matter of "Indulgences and Prayers for the Dead", must be abolished, but the general scheme of Christianity as taught by the great Fathers of the Church, especially Augustine, would, of course, remain as it had always been.

The Reformers did not attempt to alter the Creeds. To challenge the authority of the Roman Catholic Church at all, after its many centuries of undisputed sway, was a tremendous and amazing act. It demanded a courage and faith on the part of Luther and his fellow-Reformers which we can hardly realize. It was a moral rebellion against the shameful abuses which they could no longer tolerate. All that was involved in the special claims of the Roman Catholic hierarchy had to go, but this made them shrink the more from attacking anything else in the orthodox scheme of salvation. They were as orthodox as Augustine himself, in everything except the doctrine of the Pope and the Church. And as time went on, they became even more orthodox. The right of private judgement to read and understand the Bible was found to have more dangers in it than they had realized. Different sects began to arise, having their divergent views upon the Bible. Especially the Anabaptists, with the new doctrine of adult baptism, based on excellent Biblical authority, frightened them. Mingled with different views of Christian doctrine, there were new and, often, anarchic political views. Religion became, in such sects as Anabaptists, Independents, and Quakers, involved in something analogous to what in these days is called Socialism. Governments were challenged, a break-up of the old established order was threatened, men were defending all kinds of changes in social

arrangements on the basis of the independent study of the Bible.

The orthodox Reformers felt the foundations of social, moral, and religious life were being shaken. This made them more orthodox than ever. They insisted, with new emphasis, on the necessity of Creeds as well as of the Bible. They did their best to neutralize the value of the right of private judgement which they themselves had proclaimed, and shrank back in fear from its results. They had put forth their new faith in the Bible, and in the right of every man to read it for himself, in the naïve belief that every man would naturally and necessarily arrive at the orthodox conclusions which were their own. They had not imagined that the right to read the Bible involved the right to arrive at different doctrines from those contained in the Creeds. The early days of the Reformation are, therefore, marked by continual efforts to repress heresy and to keep men's minds within the limits of the Creeds. Protestant orthodoxy was as fierce against heresy, as suspicious of change, as vigilant in asserting its authority, as the Roman Church had ever been, but it lacked the unity and the supreme authority of the old united Church.

One dogma remained practically unquestioned by all, and that was the ultimate authority of the Bible. Whatever divergencies of doctrine might occur, they were always supposed to be based upon and derived from the Bible. Reason might be used in the interpretation of the Bible, but reason must not question the authority of the Bible itself.

That is the mark of the Protestant Church as a whole, Trinitarian and Unitarian, orthodox and heterodox, down to modern times. One sect may lay more stress on reason than another, but all of them defend their

views from the Bible, and none of them venture to put forth views of their own which cannot, in some way or another, be supported by their interpretation of the Bible.

But even to find in the Bible what none had found before, and to venture to hold doctrines at variance with age-long orthodoxy, demanded a daring and original mind which in the early part of the Reformation involved great danger to the men who ventured to express their thoughts. The Incarnation, the Atonement, the Trinity, the orthodox scheme of salvation were deeply impressed on the minds of men as the essentials of religion.

When the Bible was read by multitudes they did not imagine it would give them new doctrines: they rejoiced in it at first because of its moral and spiritual power, the beauty of its imagery, the force of its language and thought. It was comparatively easy to say that infant baptism is not to be found in the New Testament and to substitute adult baptism for it, but the first man who said that the Trinity was not to be found in the Bible was not only risking his life, but he was saying something entirely opposed to the traditional beliefs with which his own mind had been saturated.

CHAPTER III

SERVETUS AND SOCINUS

THERE were various sporadic Unitarians in the early Reformation times, but the outstanding names are Michael Servetus (1511–53) and Faustus Socinus (1539–1604). Servetus was a versatile, brilliant, precocious youth, capable of excellence in many directions. He had a restless intellect, and he saw things by themselves and not under the influence of authority. He was a lonely thinker, examining every subject which he took up for himself, and seeing life and books with a certain daring freedom of spirit. He was born, probably, at Tudela, a small city in Navarre, in 1511; his father removed soon after his birth to Villeneuve in Aragon, where he had an appointment as Royal Notary. Michael was sent at seventeen years old to Toulouse, then the most celebrated University in Southern France. Here he first read a Bible, probably the Complutensian Polyglot, which had been recently published. As with Luther, who first read a Bible at the age of eighteen, it made an epoch in his life. In the case of Luther the effect was mainly moral and religious. In the case of Servetus the effect, at first, was mainly intellectual. He began to draw up for himself a doctrine of God and Christ, based on the Bible and differing in many respects from orthodoxy. There was a certain simplicity and confidence, not only in himself, but in the reasonableness of others, about Servetus. He did not break with the Roman Church. He remained in a sense a Catholic

all his life. He did not attempt to found a sect: he did not join any Protestant Church. Indeed, although he appealed constantly to Protestants, his doctrines frightened or angered them even more than they frightened or angered the Catholics. He might be described as a Modernist Roman Catholic. He had no desire for separation: he wanted a reform of life and thought within the Church, and he cherished the pathetic hope, which is often found in lonely thinkers, that it only needs a serious presentation of the truth in order to achieve the desired reform. He had no respect for the Pope. He describes in later years how, in 1530, at Bologna he saw him carried on the shoulders of princes, bowed down to by earth's mightiest as little less than a god, and how absurd and profane the whole affair appeared to him. He was not a cynic, nor a satirist or a sectary. He was a man of inexhaustible energy and with an unusually independent mind. In later life he studied medicine and mathematics in Paris, and gained great distinction in these and other subjects. He wrote a short treatise on digestion which was extremely popular, and he made suggestions about the circulation of the blood which, if they had been worked out further, might have anticipated Harvey. He was one of those clever, rapid, discursive observers and thinkers who arouse the admiration or enmity of contemporaries, without leaving much of permanent value behind them.

Servetus's two books on *Errors of the Trinity* and *Dialogues on the Trinity* can hardly be described as Unitarian or Arian. It is difficult to label his views and even difficult to describe them. Christ was not God: he was divine, not by nature as the Creeds teach, but only by God's gift. He is the supreme revealer of God, and, indeed, he might be called the only revealer. We know

of God through Christ. Neither the word "Trinity" nor the idea of the Trinity is to be found in the Bible. He attacked the doctrine and even ridiculed it. He irritated his opponents most of all by writing to them as if, of course, now that the difficulties were pointed out and explained, they must agree with him.

It is not the views of Servetus, but a certain detached freedom of mind, and a belief in freedom of thought, which are most admirable and significant. He had no desire to destroy the Catholic Church or to found another. He believed in and wanted freedom of thought within the Church, and he ventured to act on that belief. It led him to his martyrdom at Geneva. It was not merely his doctrines, but his independence of mind which were anathema to Calvin.

How far the writings of Servetus influenced later Unitarianism is uncertain. No Church was founded on his doctrines, and his books were not widely read. But he had challenged the doctrine of the Trinity, and he had died as a consequence of that challenge. His death did not convert many to his beliefs, but it roused many doubts as to the wisdom or morality of such violence. He was a prominent man, and while Unitarianism as a doctrine may have gained little, Unitarianism as a principle of toleration and a belief in freedom of thought gained much from the discussions and protests and qualms which arose in the minds of religious men as a result of his burning. Latimer and Ridley at the stake lit such a candle of Protestant zeal in England as could not easily be put out. The candle that Servetus lit was not that of Unitarian zeal, but the candle of free religious inquiry. Whatever the value of his views, he was a brave, sincere man, a loyal follower of Christ, and a great believer in the value of each man seeking

the truth for himself. It is these qualities we remember and admire.

Faustus Socinus (1539–1604) is important because he was leader and organizer of an anti-Trinitarian Church in Poland, which flourished for nearly a century in an atmosphere of toleration, and which was then completely destroyed by the Jesuits. He is important also because the word Socinian has been often used, and even now is sometimes used, as a description of Unitarianism. It is a name usually applied to Unitarianism contemptuously, but there was nothing contemptible about Socinus. Modern Unitarians would not refuse the name because they are ashamed of being connected with Socinus. The only reason for refusing to be called Socinians is that it gives a misleading idea of what modern Unitarians believe.

Faustus Socinus was an Italian, and was born at Siena in 1534. There were many Italians at that time who were reading the Bible with open minds and even speculating freely on Church doctrines. It is curious that it was from the two most Catholic countries in Europe—Spain and Italy—that the two outstanding anti-Trinitarians of the Reformation period came. During the following centuries, when Roman Catholicism had reasserted its authority, and even down almost to the present time, it is not in Spain or Italy that we expect reforms in religion to arise. There is widespread scepticism on the one hand, and the Roman Catholic Church on the other: no Protestant Church of importance provides a home for those who have broken with Rome and yet wish to belong to a Church. As Mrs. Humphry Ward once said rather bitterly and with some exaggeration, "There is not faith enough in Italy to make a

heresy". In the time of Socinus there were many who were tending in the direction of heresy, but they had to find a Church to their mind elsewhere.

Laelius Socinus, uncle of Faustus, had been a scholar and thinker; he had travelled much, and come into contact with the leaders of the Reformation, Luther, Melanchthon, and Calvin. He had been suspected of heresy, especially on the subject of the Trinity. The death of Servetus had shocked him and called his attention to the Trinity. He died at the early age of thirty-seven, still ostensibly in communion with the Roman Church, leaving his MSS. to his nephew. His nephew, Faustus, revered his memory and perhaps read his writings. In his early manhood, 1563–74, he lived the life of a courtier at Florence, in somewhat similar circumstances to those in which a courtier like Sir Philip Sidney or, later, Sir Walter Raleigh, would find himself at the Court of Elizabeth. But amongst these highly born Italians there was more interest in theology than Elizabethan noblemen displayed. Faustus wrote a book while at Florence on *The Authority of Holy Scripture*, which was read and praised both by Catholics and Protestants at the time. But his Bible studies led him further, and in 1574 he left Italy, never to return, and went to Basel to study theology in a University which was at that period one of the first and freest in Europe.

The main interest for Socinus in the doctrine of the Trinity was moral and religious, not intellectual. It was the Atonement, not the metaphysical relation of the Father and the Son, which troubled him most. He wrote a book on *Christ our Saviour*, in which he defended the view that Christ is our Saviour not because he suffered for our sins, but because he showed us the way to eternal salvation. He denied that Christ suffered to appease

God's wrath, and he taught that salvation consists in following Christ and in keeping his commandments.

In this respect Socinus is closely connected with the whole Unitarian movement. The idea that Unitarianism is mainly concerned with denying the doctrine of the Trinity has never been wholly true. It is entirely untrue of modern Unitarianism, and it is untrue of Socinianism. It is the doctrine of the Atonement, of original sin, of eternal punishment, which are connected more or less closely with the doctrine of the Trinity, which Unitarians have denied most emphatically. In affirming the humanity of Jesus, they were not speculating about the internal economy of the Godhead, but considering the nature of man, the way of salvation, and the will of God. This attitude of mind, characteristic of Unitarians generally, is much more clearly marked in Socinus than in Servetus.

In 1578 Socinus removed to Poland, where he spent twenty-five years in connection with the liberal movement which he found there. "Poland was at this time a great and powerful monarchy, and one of the most free and enlightened nations of Europe. Its capital, Krakow, was the seat of a celebrated University, the second oldest in Europe, which had given the world Copernicus and other famous scholars, whilst its metropolis, Warsaw, was called 'the Paris of the East'." "King Sigismund Augustus II (1548–72), though Catholic, was tolerant, and refused to prosecute 'Dissidents', as all non-Catholics were called. Immediately after his death the Diet passed a law in 1573 guaranteeing equal protection and rights to all citizens without regard to difference of religious faith, and this law later kings, when they received the crown, were required to promise to maintain."[1]

[1] Wilbur, *Our Unitarian Heritage*, pp. 123–5.

In Poland Socinus found among what came to be called the "Minor Church" the opportunity for his work. He had a profound knowledge of the Bible, to which, of course, appeal was always made in all questions of theology: he was an accomplished debater, and unlike Servetus, he kept his temper, and never indulged in scurrilous abuse of his opponents. He possessed the manners of a courtier, and relied upon a calm appeal to reason. "A Catholic historian of Polish literature bears witness that the Socinians were intellectually the most advanced, cultivated, and talented of all Polish dissidents, and that they left an enduring impression on the history of Polish literature" (Wilbur, p. 152).

Socinus died in 1604, and the famous Racovian Catechism, based on his thought and largely drawn up by him, was published at Rakov in 1605. "Beyond doubt", says Dr. Wilbur, "it did more than any other book ever published (except the New Testament) to spread Unitarian ways of thinking about religion."

The keynote to the whole system of Socinus's doctrine lies in the text "This is life eternal, that they may know Thee the only true God and Jesus whom Thou hast sent". The Christian religion is defined at the outset as the *way* of attaining this eternal life, divinely revealed in the Scriptures.

God is only one person, and belief in the Trinity may easily destroy the faith in one God. Christ is by nature a true man, though not a *mere* man, for he was miraculously born. Nevertheless, in a sense, we must acknowledge Christ as God, being one who has divine power over us. His words are absolutely true, and his life was perfectly sinless. His resurrection assures us that we shall also rise. In dying for us he did not placate God's anger, but showed us the way to return to God

and be reconciled to Him. The Holy Ghost is not a person in the Godhead, but a power of God bestowed on man from on high. There is no such thing as predestination or original sin, and men are justified in the sight of God only through their faith in Christ. There is only one Sacrament, the Lord's Supper, which is a memorial rite and has no magical significance.

These doctrines are in some particulars not altogether clear. Especially is this the case with the doctrine of Christ. It may indeed be said of Socinianism as of much Unitarianism, which bases its arguments exclusively on the Bible, that there is considerable confusion in its doctrine of Christ. They are obliged to accept all the miracles, and especially the miraculous Conception. They are obliged to accept the Pauline and Johannine Christ. It is not difficult to deny the Trinity as unscriptural, but to form a clear conception of Jesus as a true man, and yet as being everything which is said of him anywhere in the New Testament, is a rather hopeless attempt. And yet these early reformers were obliged to make the attempt. They were convinced that the doctrine of the Trinity was not the teaching of the Bible. They were convinced that much in the Synoptic Gospels bore witness to the fact that Jesus was a man, but they were convinced also that the whole Bible was true, and they made in one way or another the heroic effort to unify and combine what are essentially different views of Christ's character into a harmonious whole. No wonder they failed.[1]

The significant fact about Socinus is, not so much

[1] At the same time Socinus recognized the possibility of some errors in the Bible. Cf. Calamy's reference to him: "The Divine Spirit therefore so directed our sacred penmen as not to suffer them to miscarry or let any dashes of their pen vary from truth, as Faustus Socinus would insinuate" (Calamy, *Life*, ii, p. 232).

that he disbelieved in the Trinity, as that he denied original sin and predestination and the doctrine of Christ's death having bought man's salvation from God. He allowed his reason and moral sense to mould his interpretation of Scriptures in this matter. As a fact, there is more proof to be cited from St. Paul's writings on behalf of original sin and predestination and the Atonement than there is on behalf of the Trinity, but in spite of such proofs from St. Paul, Socinus denied them. Consciously or not, he was beginning to assert that reason and the moral sense have their rights even against the Bible, and was claiming that the authority of conscience is above the authority of Scripture. It took many years, and needed many bitter experiences and conflicts with traditional reverence and inherited prejudices, before the supremacy of reason and conscience was fully recognized, but the beginnings of it are to be found in Socinus and the Racovian Catechism.

So far as Poland was concerned, the Jesuits destroyed completely the Socinian Church in 1638. It is an agreeable error of superficial optimism to believe that the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church, and that persecution results in the victory of the persecuted. Sporadic and incomplete persecutions have often increased the faith and strengthened the opposition of the persecuted, but a thoroughgoing persecution, such as the Spanish Inquisition and the Jesuits knew how to carry through, is often terribly successful. Socinianism was practically extirpated from Poland in 1638. Its adherents were either cowed into submission or killed or driven out into other lands. Poland was restored to the Catholic Church, and all traces of free thought and heresy disappeared.

On the other hand, in Transylvania the Diet of

July 7, 1638, "effected the famous Complanatio Deesiana, at which the Unitarians—jointly taking that name for the first time—achieved a united front, presented a common confession, and obtained from the Diet, assembled under a Calvinistic Prince, the ratification of their place among the received religions of their country. Never since, until now when Transylvania is suffering much under the Roumanian Government, has the position been questioned, even in the bitterest times of persecution". The Unitarian Church has had an unbroken history in Transylvania for more than 350 years. Francis David, born at Kolozsvar in 1510, is the apostle and hero and martyr of Transylvanian Unitarianism. Under his leadership the King himself and many of the nobles were won over to anti-Trinitarian doctrines. "It is worth noting", says Dr. Wilbur (p. 231), "that at the only time in history when there was a Unitarian King on the throne and a Unitarian Government in power, they used their power not to oppress other forms of religion, nor to secure exceptional privileges for their own." Before David died there were over 300 Unitarian churches in Transylvania and the neighbouring countries of Hungary, and before the end of the century there were 425, besides some seventy more in lower Hungary. The Unitarian King John Sigismund died a young man in 1570, and was succeeded by a new king, Stephen, who was unfriendly to the Unitarians. David became more and more pronounced in his Unitarian views, and alienated some of those who had hitherto followed him. Socinus was called in from Poland to argue with him, and warned him that his views would lead men back more and more to Judaism. David persisted in his views, and was imprisoned and treated with such harshness

that he died in his prison November 15, 1579. He refused to worship Christ as Socinus was prepared to do. He was always moving in the direction of a more definite Unitarianism, and "he was not a man to believe a thing in his heart and to keep silent about it when in his pulpit. Neither bribes nor threats could move him from faithfulness to the truth as he saw it. In his beliefs and teachings he was far in advance of Socinus and of his own time, and he was the only one of the Unitarian leaders in any country who would feel spiritually much at home among Unitarianism of the twentieth century" (Wilbur, p. 244).

He based his arguments, of course, upon the Bible, and maintained that the worship of Christ was not taught there, but his views of the person of Christ were influenced much more by his reason and less by the Bible than he imagined. His followers suffered much persecution after his death, and when in 1638 Unitarian beliefs and the Unitarian Church were officially recognized, a proviso was inserted requiring a stricter adherence to the worship of Christ (though not as God) and to the use of Sacraments.

Since then, these Churches have maintained themselves with varying success. Persecution has broken out from time to time against them in spite of the edict of toleration, but they remain, although a small, still an important, element in the religion of their country. During the last hundred years the relations between them and kindred Unitarians in England have grown continually closer, and a number of their most prominent ministers have spent one or more years in the study of theology at Manchester College, formerly in London and now in Oxford.

CHAPTER IV

BEGINNINGS OF UNITARIANISM IN ENGLAND

THE real beginning of the Churches which developed later into what is generally known as Unitarian or free Christian took place in 1662, when two thousand ministers refused to accept the Act of Uniformity, but sporadic Unitarian views existed in England before that date, and continued to exist amongst various thinkers for some time, both in the Church of England and among dissenting congregations. It is with these detached thinkers that this chapter is concerned. There are no outstanding scholars or personalities amongst them. The early days of English Unitarianism produced no leader comparable to Servetus or Socinus, nor any religious genius comparable to George Fox or John Bunyan or John Wesley. What we find in England is a widely diffused study of the Bible, which led a few comparatively obscure men here and there to doubt the doctrine of the Trinity.

In England the religious situation was different from that of the Continent. "The struggle with Ecclesiasticism", says J. J. Tayler in his *History of Religious Life in England*, "was on the Continent a conflict with Rome. In England it was a conflict with elements within the limits of our own nationality. This constitutes the peculiarity of our religious history." The break of our National Church with Rome was less complete than that of any reformed Church on the Continent. In accordance with our national character it was much

more of a compromise. The Thirty-nine Articles are definitely Protestant, but the Book of Common Prayer is a modified Catholicism. From the time of the Reformation there were three religious parties in England—the Roman Catholic, the Anglican, and the Puritans. The English Church held a middle course between the two extremes. Whenever the Roman Catholics seemed to threaten recovery of power, the Puritan elements in the country gained strength, but when the Roman Catholics were weak, the English Church showed its fear of the Puritans. There was a certain claim to independency of thought in politics and religion among the Puritans which made them seem a danger both to the State and to the Church. For the most part the Puritans were as orthodox as the Anglicans. But there was an uneasy feeling that with nothing but the Bible behind them, it was impossible to forecast what they would believe and where they would go. When Firmin petitioned Cromwell for the release of Biddle from Newgate, Cromwell replied, "You curl pate boy, do you think I will show any favour to a man who denies his Saviour and disturbs the Government?" It was disturbing the Government of which the authorities were chiefly afraid, and this fear is seen even in a ruler with Cromwell's sympathy for Independency.

There is, indeed, a possibility of worse persecution under a system which permits independent thought than under a system of Creeds. So long as men accept and repeat the Creeds they may give their own interpretation to them, but if men only accept the Bible, a constant watchfulness is required to see that their interpretations do not exceed the bounds of orthodoxy. It is easier to be heretical inside the English Church than outside it. So long as the forms are observed, the

thought may be free, but if the forms are given up the thought is more strictly watched, more quickly suspected, and more severely condemned. It is as true now as it was in the times of Elizabeth or James that Anglican thought may wander widely, while a Dissenter may not look over the hedge. Unitarian thought in an Anglican clergyman is often attractive; in a Unitarian minister it is treated with hostility or contempt.

It was not only, however, that Government and the Established Church kept a watchful eye on Puritan heresy, and repressed it with extreme severity. Puritanism itself watched its members with suspicious zeal. It was recognized that they had the right to search the Scriptures, but it was not recognized that they had the right to reach conclusions at variance with orthodoxy. The safeguard against heresy, if men are allowed to study the Bible for themselves, is persecution when they go too far.[1]

It was an awkward position for Puritan Independents, because they had to claim for themselves liberty from the State to worship God in their own way and to interpret the Bible according to their own ideas, and yet they themselves were most unwilling to tolerate any serious divergence from what they believed to be the truth. They were, on the one hand, violent enemies of Roman Catholicism, and on the other equally opposed to Socinianism or Unitarianism. It needed, then, great courage and independence of mind in any man to put

[1] Trevelyan remarks in his *History of England*: "The doctrine of persecution was an integral part of medieval Christianity. To men of the Middle Ages life outside the Church in disobedience to her doctrine was no more conceivable than life outside the State in disobedience to its laws. Religious persecution was as much a matter of course as civil police. That it should ever have cast out so deeply ingrained and so specious an error is perhaps the most solid piece of human progress to which Europe can point.'

forth heretical views in England, especially if he were not a member of the English Church.

John Biddle, 1615–62, may be taken as an illustration of what heretics suffered at this time. He was the son of a Gloucester tailor, and, showing much promise as a boy, he was sent to Magdalen Hall, Oxford, in 1634. It was said of him "that in his college days he did so philosophize that it might be observed he was more determined by reason than by authority". After taking his degree he was tutor for a time in his College, and was then appointed head master of Gloucester Grammar School. Here he was much esteemed "for his diligence in his profession, serenity of manner, and sanctity of life". He began to speak of his doubts of the doctrine of the Trinity which arose in his mind from the study of the Bible. He had not then, he tells us, read any Socinian writings. Archbishop Ussher, passing through Gloucester, argued with him in vain, but retained a certain respect for him, "for the truth is", says Anthony Wood, that "except his opinions there was little or nothing blameworthy in him". This, however, did not save him from persecution. As Fuller says of Bartholomew Legate, the last heretic to be burnt at Smithfield in 1612, "The poison of heretical doctrine is never more dangerous than when served in clean cups and washed dishes".

It is not necessary to dwell in detail on Biddle's views. As with all early English Unitarians, they were tentative and rather confused attempts to explain the nature of Christ from an independent study of the Bible. Biddle was clear that Jesus was not God, and that the Holy Ghost was not God, but he still tried to find a place for Christ and the Holy Ghost as divine personalities. This was not due to fear of the authorities or a desire

for compromise; his courage is beyond all doubt. It was due to the conditions of the problem as it presented itself to him and all independent thinkers of the time. The problem was, given the Bible as entirely true, what are we to think of Christ?

These tentative efforts to obtain a satisfactory conception of Christ, apart from the Creeds, are rather pathetic. They were foredoomed to failure; especially so when they are mainly intellectual. The character of Jesus and the teaching of Jesus were not the moving force which they have been in the lives and thoughts of many orthodox Christians. These early heretics were not in love with Jesus, not inspired by his personality. They were trying to understand his origin and purpose from the records accepted as entirely true. It was Biblical criticism of a rather prosaic, superficial kind, without any attempt to criticize the books of the Bible.

Biddle spent many months in prison and ran many risks of death, but he was immovable in his views. His Tracts made a considerable stir, so that Parliament actually passed a Draconian Ordinance in 1648 decreeing the penalty of death against anyone denying the Trinity or the Deity of Christ or of the Holy Spirit. This Ordinance, however, did not become law, and in 1652 Parliament passed a general Act of Oblivion under which Biddle was released and his broken imprisonment of more than six years was at an end. He immediately began to hold meetings in London for religious worship, and organized an independent congregation which may perhaps be described as the first Unitarian Church known in England. Its members were known as "Biddellians" or "Socinians", but they themselves preferred to be called "mere Christians", disliking any sectarian name, in this respect, at any rate, being not unlike many

modern Unitarians. During this time he published *A Twofold Catechism*, founded on the Racovian Catechism, which had been published in London in Latin in 1651. In this Catechism he denied not only the doctrine of the Trinity but many other orthodox doctrines. It was circulated in England and in Holland, and was regarded as the most dangerous form of Socinianism which had yet appeared.

Dr. Owen (1616–83), Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, the friend of Cromwell, and a famous Independent minister, was asked by the Council of State to reply to Biddle, which he did in a vigorous polemic of seven hundred pages.[1] Mere arguments, however conclusive, were not regarded as an adequate protection, and Biddle was again imprisoned. In the civic confusion of the time he again escaped death and was released for a short time, during which he went back to his congregation and taught as he had done before. He was then banished by Cromwell to the Scilly Isles, but granted a pension of 100 crowns a year. Through the influence of friends he was at last allowed to return to London, but when Charles II came to the throne he was fined £100 and put in prison until it should be paid. In the poisonous atmosphere of the prison he fell ill, and died in 1662 at the age of forty-seven. His congregation did not long survive him. John Knowles (*fl.* 1646–68) is said to have succeeded him for a short time, but he too was put in prison and silenced.

With the exception of the Rev. Thomas Emlyn, who

[1] It was Dr. Owen who wrote the Preface to the revised *Westminster Confession* issued by the Independents, in which occur the words: "The spirit of Christ is in himself too free, great, and generous a spirit to suffer himself to be used by any human arm to whip men into belief; he drives not, but gently leads into all truth, which would lose of its preciousness and value, if that sparkle of freeness shine not in it". His controversial writings do not illustrate that spirit.

preached in London for a few years in the early part of the eighteenth century, there was little, if any, definite congregational worship of a Socinian or Unitarian type until the latter part of the eighteenth century. The time following Biddle's death might be called the Tractarian Movement in English Unitarianism. These Tracts, by various writers of various opinions—Arian, Socinian, Unitarian—were published largely at the expense of Thomas Firmin, a wealthy, liberal-minded Anglican layman, "whose charity", says John Toland, the Irish Deist, "was as much extended to men of different creeds as it was to the poor of all sorts in good works". He was a remarkable man in that age, not so much for his opinions about theology, as for his philanthropy. He had befriended Biddle, and had been influenced by his opinions, but he never left the Anglican Church. He hoped for reform from within, and he desired a comprehensive charity. Pepys, the diarist, in a letter to the Lord Mayor, declares "that Firmin's good works have been too many and too conspicuous not to have covered errors of much greater magnitude than any I hear him charged with". "I am satisfied", writes a contemporary, "that he might perhaps have been a better believer, but he could not have been a better man." John Wesley, as an old man, after reading an account of Firmin's life, says, "I was exceedingly struck with it, having long settled in my mind that the entertaining wrong notions of the Trinity was inconsistent with true piety. But I cannot argue against matter of fact. I dare not deny that Mr. Firmin was a pious man, although his notions of the Trinity were quite erroneous".

Firmin belongs to a great tradition in Unitarianism of broad, public-spirited, wise philanthropists and liberal-minded thinkers. He believed intensely in education and

was a generous supporter of Christ's Hospital and a friend of the boys. He was a City mercer, and made a fortune, most of which he gave away. He was deeply interested in his employés, and tried to establish something on the lines of profit-sharing in his workshops. The release of debtors, the amelioration of the barbarous conditions of prison life, the prosecution of inhuman officials, occupied much of his time. No call of distress from any quarter reached him unheeded. He kept open house for the heretical and the impecunious. This was the man who was behind the Tractarian Movement of early Unitarianism. His own views must have been rather unsettled. He had conversed with almost all the leading clergy of his time, was on friendly terms with them, and had entertained them at his table. He was repelled by no one's views. He said, with extraordinary tolerance, that he hated Popery "more for its persecuting than its priestcraft". His mind was essentially practical and sympathetic. Heretics appealed to him, not so much because they were right, as because they were persecuted, just as the poor appealed to him, not so much because they were good, as because they were oppressed.

He did not accept all Biddle's theology, but he was entirely at one with him in a desire for religious toleration, and it is said that he learned also from Biddle "to distrust mere almsgiving, and to make it his business to fathom the condition of the poor by personal investigation, and to reduce the causes of social distress by economic effort". In all this he was far in advance of his time. "Few lives and characters", says the Rev. J. J. Tayler in his *Religious Thought in England* (p. 224), "present a greater contrast than that of Biddle and Firmin. Biddle was a laborious scholar, Firmin was a simple citizen. Biddle thought he saved mankind by

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bearing fearless witness to the truth and encountering reproach and persecution for its sake. Firmin spent his days in acts of practical benevolence, lived on terms of friendship with the clergy, and never separated himself from the communion of the Church. Biddle's high conscientiousness required men to come out of Churches which he regarded as corrupt, and to renounce all outward conformity to the profession of error. The gentle, sanguine temper of Firmin led him to hope that he could more effectively disseminate the truth by continuing where he was. If one had the zeal of a martyr, the other glowed with all the zeal of a propagandist." "At the time of his death", says Alexander Gordon, "it is said, he was meditating a plan of Unitarian congregations to meet for devotional purposes as fraternities within the Church." A Tract with the suggestive title *The Agreement of Unitarians with the Catholic Church* was published at Firmin's expense in 1693, and probably represents his point of view. He had no desire to destroy orthodoxy, but he was anxious to find room for Unitarian views within the Church, and to prove that they were orthodox in substance if not in form.

One of the most important of the Tracts printed at Firmin's expense was that written by the Rev. Stephen Nye, a clergyman holding Unitarian views, under the title *A Brief History of the Unitarians called Socinians*, in 1687. In 1691 Firmin published at his own expense a volume of Unitarian Tracts with three Tracts of Biddle's at their head, most of them written by clergymen of the Established Church. These writings stirred up the celebrated Trinitarian controversy in the Church of England, when it seemed for a time as if Unitarian beliefs might take a lasting hold of the Anglican Church and find recognition in its communion. The views set

forward are, of course, very far removed from modern Unitarianism. They were essentially Scriptural, and in many respects very vague. By Unitarian, Firmin meant "one who holds the doctrines of the Trinity in some sense which does *not* imply belief in three Gods". In that sense it could be accepted by all orthodox Trinitarians, and Firmin's aim was to conciliate opponents and to arrive at an underlying unity of agreement.

The chief result of the Unitarian Tracts was to stir up a heated controversy about the Trinity, in which various eminent orthodox divines took part. Some of them, to their astonishment, discovered that in attempting to expound the Trinity they were regarded as falling into various forms of heresy. Professor John Wallis of Oxford, a famous mathematician, compared the belief in one God composed of three equal persons to a cube of which the length, breadth, and height are all equal. Dr. Sherlock, Dean of St. Paul's, with the intrepidity and scholarship which is characteristic of that Deanery, put forth a view that the Father and Son and Holy Ghost are three Persons as distinct as Peter, James, and John. Dr. South, the famous preacher, charged Sherlock, not unnaturally, with Tritheism, and put forth views which in their turn were condemned as Sabellian, making the Trinity into three aspects or modes of the one God. Finally the Archbishop persuaded the King to issue orders to the clergy to abstain from unaccustomed explanations of the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity had not been discussed with so much heat and, perhaps it may be added, with so much intelligent desire to understand and explain it, since the days of early Christianity. The result was the emergence of many discordant and heretical views expressed by Churchmen who had every intention of being orthodox. It seemed

impossible to deal with the doctrine intelligently without saying something unorthodox. Under these circumstances it was judged safer to relapse into the old mood of regarding the Trinity as a mystery, to accept the Creeds without attempting to explain them, and to refute and condemn heresy without justifying orthodoxy.

That is the temper and spirit of much of the eighteenth-century orthodoxy. It is concerned with things it can understand, and leaves mysteries alone. It is interested in morality, and in rational explanations of matters within the province of reason. It dreads enthusiasm, whether it be the enthusiasm of the emotions or the intellect. Sober common sense is its aim and spirit. Mysteries are best left alone: they cannot be expressed or understood. What the eighteenth-century writers desired was to express plain thoughts in plain prose. What could not be put into plain prose or clever couplets was better ignored.[1]

Deism on the one hand, and orthodox Anglicanism and Dissent on the other, were of this rather prosaic type, and it has to be admitted that Unitarianism in the eighteenth-century, and on into the nineteenth century, conformed to that type, and perhaps carried on that eighteenth century tradition longer than any other section of the Christian Church. Orthodox common sense and moderation and the timid fear of extremes were challenged first by the Wesleyan and then by the Evangelical and then by the Ritualistic Movements. Unitarianism, down to the time of Channing in America and Martineau in England, remained essentially eighteenth century in character and type.

[1] Cf. the Preface to Jonathan Edwards's *Original Sin*: "He made a noble stand against Enthusiasm and false Religion by his incomparable Treatise on Religious Affections".

CHAPTER V

THE LATITUDINARIAN MOVEMENT

SIDE by side with the bitter controversies between High Churchmen, Presbyterians, Independents, and Socinians in the seventeenth century, there was a small group of Churchmen of a different spirit, whose writings are still of great value and whose influence on early Nonconformists can hardly be overestimated. Baxter and Howe, two of the leading clergymen who came out in 1662, owed much to the writings of Hales of Eton and Cudworth and Whichcote. "It is significant of the principles then prevalent among the leading Presbyterians", says J. J. Tayler in his *Religious Life in England* (p. 153), "that Howe, in proof of his position that the imposers of things indifferent are the true schismatics, appealed to the authority ot the celebrated Latitudinarian Hales of Eton." He might have gone still farther back and quoted the words of Elijah to Ahab, when Ahab greets him with the words "Is it thou, thou troubler of Israel?" And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and thou hast followed Baalim". It is profoundly true that the real schismatics are often those who drive others into schism, and the real revolutionaries are often those who cause others to revolt.[1]

[1] Cf. Baxter, *Defence of our Proposals to His Majesty for Agreement in Matter of Religion*: "Whether the imposers or the forbearers do hazard and disturb the Church the nature of the

That spirit of unwilling sorrowful protest against authority in behalf of a higher unity, a spirit of devotion to essentials, and a dislike of unnecessary schism, is the mark of the true Catholic. There was, no doubt, a sterner determination in the early Nonconformists to sacrifice everything for principle than existed among the Latitudinarians, but the desire for Catholic unity and the emphasis on the essentials of religion, as more important than the doctrines in which religion is expressed, are derived largely from the Cambridge Platonists. Hales was an Oxford man, and preceded the Cambridge Platonists in time. He was a friend of Falkland and a Royalist. His temper and thought were essentially those of Liberal Christianity. These men were the broad Churchmen of the seventeenth century. It is the temper of these men, Whichcote, Smith, Cudworth, and More, amidst the bitter personalities and animosities of the seventeenth century, which is the most important and characteristic quality about them. The following aphorisms of Whichcote are typical of all of them. "Universal charity is a thing final in religion." "The end of Law and Gospel is a character, is love out of a pure heart, to whatever is lovely, noble, just, and true. If this be first in fact, why not make it first in your esteem? If a man manifest the Christian temper and life, why reject him? God will receive him, why not you? The gate is too wide, you say. It would admit some who have no Christian Creed, and many whose Creed is defective, and even not a few who do not preach Christ. Men may preach Christ though they do

thing declareth. . . . The princes might have forborne to make a law restraining Daniel three days from prayer; but Daniel could not forbear praying three days though the Lord commanded it. Which of them then was the disturber of the peace?"

not name Christ in every sentence in words. If men contend for the effects of real goodness and deny wickedness, they do truly and properly preach Christ."

This is liberal religion as it is found in many Churches to-day. Through the influence of Baxter and Howe and others, it has been one of the characteristic marks of Churches now known as Unitarian. There are two other characteristics in these Cambridge thinkers which are also especially marks of the later Unitarian Movement. The first of them was a great emphasis on Reason. "A man has as much right to use his own understanding in judging of truth as he has a right to use his eyes to see his way. To go against reason is to go against God. Reason is the divine governor of man's life: it is the very voice of God." They admitted that "the eye of reason is weakened through the Fall", but it is not destroyed. It can still see the light, and God on His part has given light to every man in the measure of his receptiveness. "God is the ocean of light wherein all spirits move and live."

These Cambridge thinkers did not overtly deny the Fall or any other Biblical doctrine; they were not controversialists, and they were not anti-Trinitarian; but they were not dominated by doctrine. Scripture is not more divine than "the natural light of reason. God, the Fountain of Light, is equally the Fountain of both. What Scripture does is to confirm natural truth". This attitude of mind again, so unexpected in the bitter controversies and fierce bigotry of the seventeenth century, belongs to the spirit of Liberal Nonconformity. It has affinities with Quakerism, but is not identical with it. The natural light of Reason is hardly the mystical guiding spirit of the Quakers.

The second characteristic of the Cambridge Platonists,

which belongs also to Liberal Christianity of later days, is the emphasis on morality. "The moral element in Scripture for these Cambridge men was supreme", says Mr. Powicke in his book on *Cambridge Platonists*. "However texts might be quoted and examples adduced from the Old Testament in support of some questionable doctrine or practice, they were of no account." "The moral part of Religion never alters. Moral Laws are laws of themselves, and the necessity of them arises from the things themselves." Cudworth, in his courageous sermon before the House of Commons in 1647, when theological controversy was raging, and when the Presbyterian section in Parliament was full of bigotry, dared to say, "If any of you say that you know Christ and have an interest in him, and yet (as I fear too many do) still nourish ambition, pride, vainglory in your hearts, harbour malice, revengefulness, and cruel hatred to your neighbour in your hearts . . . deceive not yourselves, you have neither seen Christ nor known him. Let us really declare that we know Christ . . . by our keeping of his commandments and among the rest, that commandment especially, 'This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you'. Let us endeavour to promote the Gospel with a dove-like spirit. Let us take heed that we do not sometimes call that zeal for God and His Gospel which is nothing else but our own tempestuous and strong passion. True zeal is a sweet, heavenly, and gentle flame which maketh us active for God, but always within the sphere of love".

We read such words with a sense of deep, restful satisfaction. Men of such temper who remind Christians of the true way of life are to be found in all ages and in all Churches, but they are to be found nowhere in more unlikely surroundings, or in a more marked degree,

than among the Cambridge Platonists. In the midst of the civil war and all the political and theological bitterness of the time, when even a great poet and scholar like Milton wrote of his opponents with scurrilous violence, these men retain an attitude of "sweet reasonableness". They believe in liberty of thought guided by God's natural gift of reason, they believe in righteousness, and they believe in Love. They did not break with the Church of England, but they tried to make Christianity more comprehensive, and above all more charitable. They desired to reduce necessary Christian doctrines to the smallest number of fundamentals which would include all those who sincerely loved and tried to follow Christ. They felt no call to come out of the Church as a protest against its bigotry or narrowness; they were indeed less in sympathy with Presbyterians and Independents who were prevailingly Calvinists than they were with their own Anglican Church. They left no school or movement behind them, but their influence on individuals was great. That influence was carried into Nonconformity by Baxter and Howe, and in later generations is felt in the growing liberality of thought and the deepened reverence for the teaching of Christ which is found in those Nonconformist Congregations which were developing into Unitarianism.

CHAPTER VI

THE ACT OF UNIFORMITY

THE real beginning of the Congregations known as Free Christian or Unitarian in England is not with the Tracts or with any controversy about the Trinity. They begin with the Act of Uniformity in 1662, and with the refusal of two thousand ministers in the Church of England to accept that Act. "The Unitarian controversy or movement in the seventeenth century in England", says the Rev. W. Lloyd,[1] "was confined to literature, and had no connection with dissenting Congregations." On the other hand, it may be said that few, if any, of the two thousand clergymen who left the Church of England on St. Bartholomew's Day, for conscience' sake, were even Arian, still less Socinian or Unitarian. Many of them were Calvinists, most of them were thoroughly orthodox. Nevertheless, it is out of the Congregations founded by these men and their descendants, that a considerable part of the Free Christian and Unitarian Congregations now in existence have developed. "About 160 of English Unitarian Churches", says the Rev. R. V. Holt (Unitarian Historical Society, October 1925), "trace back their origin to this source, besides some in Wales and Ireland."[2]

There is a striking difference between the action of

[1] *Protestant Dissent and English Unitarianism.*

[2] There are 278 Congregations in England which can be described as Unitarian or Free Christian according to the *Essex Hall Year Book* in 1926.

the English clergy under Henry VIII and under Charles II. When Henry ordered the clergy to break with the Pope, the great majority obeyed. There were a few martyrs, like Fisher, Bishop of London, among the clergy and like Sir Thomas More among laymen, but there was no exodus from the Church comparable to that under Charles II. Partly it may be because the clergy were weary of Roman domination, and partly it may be because the interest in religion was less deep. At any rate, Henry found his Reformation comparatively easy to accomplish. There was no exodus of Roman Catholic clergy comparable to the exodus of Presbyterians in 1662. As Mr. Powicke says in his Introduction to the *Cambridge Platonists*: "England was never more intensely alive than in the middle of the seventeenth century. At that time, if at any time, in our history, God seemed to men a living God. We need not say, as Carlyle would seem to say, that He was a living God only to the Puritans. A faith in God which craved to know what was right to believe about Him, and in what way it was right to worship Him; a faith which charged all actions of the present life with momentous issues for the life to come was not confined to Puritans. It was a possession diffused more or less through all parties and ranks. It was as real in Falkland as in Cromwell, in Laud as in Owen, in George Herbert as in Colonel Hutchinson. In this view the tumult and contentions which to men like Baxter appeared so utterly deplorable may be seen to deserve something more than denunciation. We are to God, not what we are but what we mean, and there was scarcely a sect in those earnest days which did not mean or intend the truth."

The Nonconformist exodus of 1662 meant that men were taking their religion seriously. These men were not

cranks who enjoyed separation. They were not revolutionaries who wanted to destroy the Church of England. They were not missionaries on behalf of a new faith. They had no sectarian spirit. They went out most unwillingly, like Abraham of old, not knowing whither they went. They gave up their livelihood, their settled position, their work, and their familiar friends, without any expectation of a promised land. It was, with the great majority of them, simply a question of religious veracity. They were forced to be separatists against their will.

"The Act of Uniformity of 1662 restored the Prayer Book and turned adrift without compensation two thousand clergy who could not assert their unqualified consent and assent to everything the Book contained. The Conventicle Act, of two years later, made prison and transportation the lot of those caught in acts of dissenting worship", says Mr. Trevelyan in his *History of England*; he then goes on to remind us, "These Statutes were the policy of Parliament, not of the King. Laud's religion triumphed, but not through the royal power, nor through the clerical jurisdiction and authority which he had striven to restore, but through the action of the Parliament of Squires whose right to pronounce upon religion he and Charles I had died rather than acknowledge".

It is natural for liberal religious minds to regret the narrowness and severity and lack of all conciliation in the Act of Uniformity. Unitarians, generally speaking, have never enjoyed being Nonconformists. They would always have preferred comprehension, if it did not involve unveracity. They have been, like Baxter, unwilling exiles, and many of them still look forward to the possibility of inclusion in a Catholic Church in

which no Creeds will interfere with the sincere and full expression of their Christian faith.

But it is possible, as Mr. Trevelyan believes, that religious liberty gained more than it lost through the mistaken bigotry of Parliament.

It is an optimistic view of History which tends to do away with all moral judgements, to suppose that every mistake and folly committed by individuals or nations somehow turns out to have been the best thing possible and a blessing in disguise. But it may perhaps be said that whenever mistakes and follies and tyranny lead to heroic reactions and to high sacrifices, their evil is largely neutralized and even turned to good. "It may at least be questioned", says Mr. Trevelyan, "whether the Act of Uniformity has not led to more religious, intellectual, and political liberty than would have resulted from a wider extension of the boundaries of the Established Church. If the plan to 'comprehend' Baxter and the moderate Puritans had succeeded at the abortive Savoy Conferences of 1661, the Quakers, Baptists, and more advanced sects who must still have been left outside, might have been too isolated and inconsiderable ever to enforce the claim of toleration for themselves. The arrangements actually made, under which the Church of England and the various Puritan Churches followed each its own line of development, rendered toleration inevitable ere long, and led to the variety and competition of religious bodies characteristic of modern England." Mr. J. R. Green holds the same view: "The bulk of the Puritan party, with the Presbyterians at its head, was at one with its opponents in desiring Uniformity of Worship, if not belief, throughout the land: and had the two great parties in the Church held together, their weight would have been almost irresistible".

"What will become of us", asked a Presbyterian, "now that the King has rejected our proposals?" "What would become of us", retorted an Independent, "if he had accepted them?"

This large and weighty accession to the ranks of those already outside the Church of England undoubtedly made toleration more rapid and more inevitable. It gave more dignity to Dissent, and it also infused into Dissent a more genial spirit of culture and kindliness. These Presbyterian Nonconformists retained a love for their old Church and a pathetic desire to return to it, similar to that of early colonists for their homeland. Richard Baxter (1615–91) represents the best type of those two thousand clergymen who left their Church for conscience' sake. He was one of the most prolific writers and greatest controversialists of his time. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that different, and even contradictory, opinions can be quoted from his writings. His catholicity of mind and his "sweet reasonableness" have been sometimes exaggerated. He loved argument, and did not always treat his opponents with courtesy. His temper was not that of the Latitudinarians, Whichcote and Smith: he was more interested in doctrines than they were, and more resolute in maintaining what he believed to be the truth. Skeats describes his controversial works as "the most abusive even of that age", and calls him "the disputatious and zealous Baxter". He was undoubtedly zealous against Papists and Socinians. It would be claiming too much for him to call him a believer in liberty of thought. "His life", he says, when in the army as chaplain, "was a daily contending against seducers. Their most frequent and vehement disputes were for liberty of conscience, as they called it, i.e. that the civil magistrates had

nothing to do with religion by constraint or restraint, but every man might not only hold and believe, but preach and do in matters of religion what he pleased" (Calamy, *Abridgement*, p. 89). It must be remembered that Baxter was living at a time when the wildest and most varied political, social, and moral views were promulgated in the name of religion, and that he was essentially a moderate man who disliked and feared extremes. He is hardly to be blamed because he shared the general opinions of his age that religious worship and the expression of religious thought must be controlled by the State. The true Baxter is to be seen in such words as the following: "I can never believe that a man may not be saved by that religion which doth bring him to a true love of God and to a heavenly mind and life, nor that God will ever cast a soul into Hell that truly loveth Him" (*Life and Times*, Part I, p. 213). And he says elsewhere, "I am not so much inclined to pass a peremptory sentence of damnation upon all that never heard of Christ, having some more reason than I knew of before to think that God's dealings with such is much unknown to us, and that the ungodly here amongst us Christians are in a far worse case than they". He once said towards the end of his life "that there might be a true and availing Christianity even amongst Papists".

He was that curious, unusual combination of a man whose spirit was essentially liberal and comprehensive in its desires, seeking peace, working for unity, and yet a man of vigorous thought, eager to understand and to expound, and to insist upon his own point of view. Tolerant men are often rather indifferent to dogma and irresolute in their opinions; dogmatic men are often wanting in any large ideals of Catholicity. Baxter held

his own opinions firmly, and fought for them with all the energy of a forceful mind, and yet he was essentially liberal and catholic in spirit, desiring a unity deeper and more real than that of a common belief in Creeds and Articles.

The moderate man, when he is brave and resolute in his moderation, often suffers more from misunderstanding than the extremist. Baxter's moderation made him first oppose Charles I and then oppose Cromwell: he belonged to no party, and was suspected by all. He was not a good Episcopalian, or a good Presbyterian, or a good Independent in the sense of whole-heartedly supporting one against the other. No party could count upon him to support it, as every party likes to be supported, when it is wrong. He was not a party man: he hated party spirit. It was not that he was a cynical outsider looking down in a superior way on the conflicts of his time. He was extremely concerned with all the conflicts in theology and politics of his time, but he did not attach himself blindly to any party.

It was with much sorrow and reluctance that he declined to sign the Act of Uniformity. A man more inclined to give up everything on behalf of peace and unity would have signed. A man more in love with his own views would have come out in anger and bitterness, and would have spent his life in opposing the Church which had persecuted him. Richard Baxter did neither. He refused to sign, but he made no effort to overthrow the Church which had driven him out or to substitute another in its place. "When he took out a licence to preach in 1672, it was not under the title of Independent or Presbyterian or any other party, but simply as a Nonconformist." When King James issued his famous Indulgence in 1687, granting liberty of conscience to all

his subjects, Baxter refrained from going with other Nonconformists to thank the King for his gracious gift. He felt, as the best statesmen of the time felt, that it was an act of outrage on the Constitution. He supported the Anglican Church in resisting the King. As Macaulay says, "A monarch who is competent to issue such a declaration on his own authority is nothing less than an absolute monarch".

It is a mark of the wisest Nonconformists of that time and of later ages that their love of civil and religious liberty was one. They would not accept religious liberty which involved the loss of civil liberty. They would not accept a gift from one who was an enemy of the Constitution. They could have echoed the well-known line of Virgil, "Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes".

In 1688, true to his lifelong principles, he entered heart and soul into the coalition of the Protestant Dissenters with the clergy of the National Church against the popish King James II. "The Church of England", says the Rev. A. Gordon, "had a short memory for what Baxter, Howe, and Bates helped them to achieve."[1] "The influence of his spirit and example", says the Rev. J. J. Tayler, "on the next generation of Nonconformists can hardly be too highly estimated."

Baxter was certainly not a Unitarian, although his views on the Trinity are vague, but in his love for civil and religious liberty, and in his desire for Christian unity, based on life and character rather than on creeds, he represents much that found fuller expression in Channing and Martineau. Baxter would have agreed with the author of *De Imitatione* when he said "What

[1] "The Dissenters," says Calamy (*Life*, ii, p. 276), "were never courted but with a design to be used like David's heifer, first to draw the cart and then to be burnt with the wood of it."

doth it profit thee to reason profoundly concerning the Trinity, if thou be void of humanity and thereby displeasing the Trinity?".

Channing and Martineau would have said, on the other hand, "What doth it profit thee to reason profoundly concerning the unity of God, if thou be void of humility and thereby displeasing to the Unity?". Both would have united in saying with St. James, "Thou believest that God is one. Thou doest well. The devils also believe and tremble".

CHAPTER VII

DEVELOPMENTS IN NONCONFORMITY

FOR some years after the Act of Uniformity the Nonconformists led a precarious life. All assembling of themselves together for worship was a penal offence. In spite of persecutions they managed to persist, always hoping for changes in the law and in the spirit of the Church by which they might be enabled to return. By the time when William and Mary came to the throne in 1688 the Nonconformists had lost hope of inclusion, and when the Act of Toleration was passed in 1689, they availed themselves of it to build chapels of their own. They were still mainly orthodox, and so far as we can see, were unaffected by the Unitarian Tracts. The remarkable fact about these chapels is that they were, for the most part, built with Open or non-doctrinal Trusts, i.e. the purpose for which the particular chapel was founded is said to be "for the worship of Almighty God", and nothing more. This meant that the congregations worshipping in these chapels might change their doctrinal views to any extent, so long as they continued still to worship God. Thus the Hull Trust Deed in 1696 says that the chapel is "to be used as a place for the worship of God and administration of the Sacraments", and the Bolton Trust Deed simply says "that the said chapel shall be employed for the exercise of divine worship therein, and by such a congregation and assembly of Protestants only, as shall be dissenting from the Church of England". These are typical examples of Open

Trusts on which the early Nonconformist chapels were founded.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century there were 750 of these so-called Presbyterian chapels, called Presbyterian not because they retained any Presbyterian organization, but because they were founded by the men who left the Church of England in 1662, and who were then in sympathy with the Presbyterians of the Commonwealth. Many of these chapels disappeared in the eighteenth century, some of them have continued orthodox down to the present time, but about 160 of them have become Unitarian.

It has often been argued that these chapels were founded on Open Trusts with a view to doctrinal changes. It has been supposed that our ancestors anticipated great changes in doctrine, and even hoped for them, and that they built these chapels with the view of making it easy for future generations to continue worshipping in them as Unitarians. There is absolutely no proof of this. They did not build for the future, but for the present. They were quite certain of their own orthodoxy, and did not feel it necessary to explain what they believed in their Trust Deeds. So far from expecting that their chapels would become Unitarian, it probably never occurred to them as possible. Their Open Trusts rather represent a perfect confidence in their own views as immutable. They did not consider it necessary to guard against changes of doctrine, because they had no expectation of any serious change.[1]

At the same time, there was a leaven of free thought working in them, almost unrecognized by themselves,

[1] The Toleration Act of 1689 excluded Roman Catholics and those who impugned the Trinity from its benefit. It was under the shelter of this Act that most of the Open Trust chapels were built.

which made them avoid written creeds and depend more entirely upon the Bible. They did not like signing Articles or binding one another by formal creeds. Baxter's motto adopted from an old writer influenced them all—

> In things necessary, unity;
> In things unnecessary, liberty;
> And charity in all.

Baxter himself even shrank from defining "the things necessary", and this shrinking from defining what must be agreed upon by everybody increased as time went on. So far as genuine orthodoxy is concerned, there was more of it among the Nonconformists than in the Church of England. In Pierce's *Vindication of the Dissenters*, published in 1710, he says, "that whereas in the Established Church it is well known that there were Socinians, in the Protestant Dissenting body there were none". "He pledges himself", says Mr. Gordon, "to the fact: and no doubt he is right, unless we except some obscure Independents and some few Baptist Congregations."

The most outspoken and unorthodox theological work of the time was by Dr. Samuel Clarke, Rector of St. James's, Piccadilly, who published a book in 1712 which he called *The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity*. Many of those who read it said, "Well, it may be Scripture or it may not: it certainly is not the doctrine of the Trinity". The book had a great influence, especially upon Nonconformists. While hitherto they had been more orthodox than such a thinker as Clarke, they were more unprotected. They had no definite creed to keep them straight. In the Church a man may be unorthodox, but if he repeats the Creed he somehow seems to himself and others to be kept within bounds. He cannot go utterly

astray. He is bound in some way, however curious, to make his faith conform to his creed. But if he has no creed, and the Bible alone is his authority, he is unprotected. In spite of himself his thought may move and develop, and he will not be kept in order and checked by any external authority. This is what happened to many Nonconformists in the eighteenth century, and led them into unorthodoxy almost against their will and without their knowledge. They were free from creedal shackles, and found themselves advancing on a path they had not chosen for themselves.

A critical moment in the history of Liberal Nonconformity occurred at what is called the Salter's Hall controversy. James Pierce, a Nonconformist minister at Exeter, was suspected of heresy. The Judge of Assizes, Sir Robert Price, in 1718, when charging the jury had referred to the spread of crime in the city. He had also said that there was a spirit of Arianism abroad, and he thought there was some connection between the two. The other Nonconformist ministers in Exeter became alarmed, and demanded from Pierce and two other suspected ministers a definite reply to questions as to their belief in the Trinity and Atonement. Not getting what they wanted, and being dissatisfied, they appealed to the London Dissenters. Pierce did the same. The result was a gathering of some 110 Presbyterians, Baptists, and Independents in Salters' Hall in 1719, to consider what should be done. The question was whether these ministers should adopt certain "Advices" or Principles which had been recently passed by an important gathering of laymen to protect the civil rights of Dissenters, or whether they should add to them. The two principles which the dissenting laymen had recommended as sufficient for the protection of the

laity were: (1) "There are doctrinal errors which warrant congregations in withdrawing from their minister; and (2) the Congregation is to determine what these errors are". These principles leave each congregation free to accept or alter any doctrinal views. It was the refusal to dominate or dictate to any congregation in the choice of its minister or the beliefs which it adopted. You are justified in leaving your minister, or getting him to leave you, if he preaches what you do not believe, but it is your business, not ours, to decide what errors justify you in so acting. Bradbury, the leader of the orthodox party, saw that the Advices were going to be carried, and proposed that the doctrine of the Trinity should be set forth and offered as a preamble. His defining terms were taken from the Shorter Catechism. The meeting divided on the question whether the Advices should stand alone with the understanding that the Bible was sufficient authority for any congregation, or whether the declaration of the doctrine of the Trinity should be attached as a preamble. Those who were against the preamble were asked to go up into the gallery, those in favour of it to remain on the floor of the house. Fifty-seven went up into the gallery, and fifty-three remained on the floor. Consequently Bradbury's preamble was lost by four votes, or, as a spectator of the proceedings remarked, "The Bible has it by four".

The division was not definitely between Presbyterians on the one side and Independents on the other. There was cross-voting. Some Independents voted against Bradbury and some with him: the older Presbyterians voted with Bradbury and the younger against him. It was a rather a division between youth and age than between two parties. Further, it must be added that while the majority had declined to make an affirmation

of the Trinity as part of their resolution to be sent to Exeter, they drew up a separate letter to be sent to the Exeter ministers with their resolution, affirming their joint belief in the Trinity and condemning Arianism, finally adding, however, that they were not prepared to quarrel with anyone if he did not adopt their definition, or if he preferred to limit himself to Scripture terms only. That letter is very characteristic of Englishmen in its desire for compromise and conciliation. But the resolution itself was not a compromise: it was a recognition of the freedom of the individual congregation and a refusal to impose creeds or interfere with changing thought. It was, as Mr. Gordon says, "A conflict precipitating a cleavage between the spirit of uniformity and the spirit of liberty. We may fairly claim that the Salter's Hall rift worked out so as to sever two tendencies, and let each do its best in making English history. From the middle of the eighteenth century those who were for doctrinal uniformity got the name of Independents, and those who were not for uniformity but for tolerance and liberty got the name of Presbyterians" (*The Story of Salters' Hall*, A. Gordon's Addresses).

The term "Non-subscribing"—a rather ugly and misleading term in itself—became from this time and occasion one of the names by which those who refused to sign or impose creeds as a bond of religious fellowship described themselves. The Churches which stood for non-subscription were not necessarily unorthodox. Many of them still accepted the beliefs of their forefathers, but they were moving towards the position that the doctrines expressed in the Creeds were not necessary to union in worship.

There are two quite different attitudes of mind which

must be carefully distinguished in order to understand the source and inner meaning of the Unitarian Movement. There is the position, on the one hand, which is not in the least peculiar to orthodoxy, though it is often supposed to be so, that my religion is true and every other form of religion necessarily false. It is quite possible for those who deny the Trinity to regard those who accept it with the same contempt and anger as those who accept the Trinity have expressed for those who deny it. Usually, indeed, heresy begins with a modest claim to toleration; it asks for leave to live and express its own thoughts side by side with the dominant orthodoxy. But heresy, when it gains more power, often becomes as ready to persecute or excommunicate as the orthodoxy from which it has broken away. Protestants in the past have persecuted Roman Catholics as well as Roman Catholics Protestants. Presbyterians have persecuted Anglicans when they had the opportunity, as well as Anglicans Presbyterians. Unitarians have not had the opportunity to persecute because they have never been in the majority, but intolerance of thought towards those who differ from them has not been unknown among Unitarians. So far as this has been the case, they have been untrue to the great traditions of their Church life and fellowship. The other position is a respect for all sincere religious thought and practice, a desire to understand and sympathize with it, and a recognition of its right to exist united with the feeling that no Church, not even our own, is in possession of all the truth. This attitude of mind may be justly claimed as especially characteristic of leading Unitarians like Channing and Martineau, who represent the best tradition of their Presbyterian or Puritan forefathers.

CHAPTER VIII

CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

THE claim of non-subscribing Churches in the eighteenth century was twofold; it was for civil liberty and for religious liberty. The former claim they made in common with all Nonconformist Churches and with the Roman Catholics and Jews. They asked permission from the State to worship God in accordance with their own beliefs. They asked for non-interference, to be let alone, to be freed from the disabilities in serving the State and the hindrances to worshipping God which so long hampered them. They wanted to have the same privileges and the same freedom as Anglicans. They wanted to be allowed to conduct marriages in their own chapels, to be allowed to study at the old Universities, and take degrees there without signing the Anglican Articles; they wanted to sit in Parliament and to hold office in their towns, to have full civil and national rights of every kind without denying their own faith, and pretending to adopt Creeds and Articles which they did not believe. It was a long and painful conflict. The Nonconformists as a whole stood together in their battle for civil liberty; much was gained in the eighteenth century, and much more in the nineteenth century. It was only in 1870 that the compulsion of signing the Articles as a condition to taking a degree at Oxford and Cambridge was done away.

The Unitarians at the end of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century were amongst

the most prominent, moderate, and Catholic-minded of Nonconformists in fighting for civil liberty. What they wanted for themselves they were equally anxious should be given to others. They strove earnestly for the emancipation of Roman Catholics and Jews: they were confident and fearless in their belief that the State should take no account of differences of religious belief. They, more than any other dissenters, carried their confidence in the right to civil liberty and freedom from all disabilities to the extent of condemning the Blasphemy Acts and supporting the claims of Mr. Bradlaugh, who called himself an Atheist, to take his seat in Parliament without affirming his belief in God.

The fight for civil liberty in England has practically succeeded. The disabilities of Dissenters, Jews, Roman Catholics, and others have been done away, although, no doubt, as compared with the United States or the Colonies, the Established Church of England and its members still have certain advantages of prestige and power.

But there is another kind of liberty which might be called religious liberty which is less generally recognized, and which is more definitely the inheritance and the spirit of the Liberal Christian Congregation, now generally known as Unitarian. It is the policy of non-subscription, it is disinclination to make the Creeds, or any creed, the bond of Church Union. This tendency is found increasingly in the eighteenth century among the so-called Presbyterian Churches. They still regarded the Bible as their ultimate authority and the primary source for all religious doctrine, but they were not inclined, as the early Reformers and Puritans were, to exclude from religious communion those who came to

somewhat different conclusions from their own as to the teaching of the Bible.

The point of view that no particular creed is necessary to salvation, and that reverent freedom of thought in religion is to be recognized as right and even welcomed wherever it may lead, involves more than at first appears. It involves really a growing doubt as to the absolute truth of any creed.

It is possible for a man to hold that righteousness and love and the Spirit of Christ are more important than belief in a creed, however true. This is what the Latitudinarians did, and what the best Christians in all Churches do to-day. However firm their faith in their own creed, they still feel, and surely feel rightly, that the good life is of more importance than correct belief.

But the Churches of the eighteenth century which developed into Unitarianism went further than this. It was not merely that they insisted on the superiority of the good life to the best creed, but they were coming to regard the old Creeds about the Trinity and the Atonement as unimportant. They were coming to regard them with indifference. They refused to impose Creeds because they wanted freedom of thought more than agreement in doctrines. Even the strictest orthodoxy, if it has the Spirit of Christ, may recognize that real goodness and love are better than belief in the truest creed, and that the first may exist among men who seem to them to possess a very imperfect faith. But strict orthodoxy finds it much more difficult to accept freedom of thought as better than belief in the truth. It may try to persuade itself that freedom of thought must lead at last to orthodoxy, but the facts are against it, and it is driven back, in spite of itself, to condemn those who come to wrong conclusions and to hedge in freedom

of thought among its members with restrictions. It is not prepared to approve, still less to encourage, members of its Church who discover new truths for themselves, and who regard the old Creeds with indifference.

Among the congregations in the eighteenth century which were tending towards Arianism and Unitarianism there is a variety of emphasis in regard to the truth of certain doctrines and belief in freedom. With some, the emphasis lay on a denial of the Deity of Christ: with others, the emphasis lay on a denial of the necessity of Creeds, and in a claim to free thought in religion. These latter did not always overtly deny the Deity of Christ. They claimed liberty to worship God after their own manner and to interpret the Bible according to their own reason, without being compelled to arrive at the full doctrine of the Creeds. Implicit in that demand is a denial of the necessity of the Creeds for salvation, and to deny this is essentially to deny orthodoxy. An orthodox believer who denies the necessity of orthodoxy is already unorthodox without knowing it. If the assertions of the Apostles' and the Nicene Creed are true, they are tremendously and awfully true. The Athanasian Creed, with its damnatory clauses, is their logical consequence. If this revelation from God has been given in the form in which they express it, if these facts are absolutely true, if the whole amazing story is as they describe it, if this is the scheme of salvation, then there is no salvation outside it. To talk about the importance of Creeds, and at the same time to claim freedom of thought, is to deny the Creeds. You cannot be truly orthodox and affirm at the same time that freedom of thought wherever it may lead is more important than orthodoxy. Implicit in all freedom of thought there lies the tendency, which has been seen throughout the

Unitarian Movement, to develop into a belief in a purely human Jesus. That is what Cardinal Newman clearly saw when he attacked what he called "Liberalism" in the Church. "By Liberalism I meant the anti-dogmatic principle and its developments", he says in his *Apologia*. He means by this, not so much disbelief in a dogma as the denial of the necessity of dogma, and he sees clearly that the denial of the necessity of dogma must lead, in time, to the denial of the dogma. If you deny that it is necessary to salvation to believe that Jesus is the second person in the Trinity, even though you still think you believe it yourself, you are really denying it. If that awful statement is really true, it must be vitally important to believe it. Liberty of thought is infinitely unimportant in comparison. To deny its necessity is to affirm it is unimportant and that we can get on religiously without it, and to affirm this is to deny its truth.

It does not follow, as Cardinal Newman would have us believe, that for Liberalism one Creed is as good as another, and that therefore no religion is true and all are equally impotent and valueless. Dr. James Drummond has well said, in answer to this attack of Newman, "One of the clearest and most certain facts of religious history is this, that the love of truth and righteousness and the vision of God are not confined to any particular Church or Creed, and the inference surely follows that the inward life of the spirit is deeper and truer than the doctrinal expressions which we give to its implications in thought. Liberalism does not mean that we are indifferent to truth, or think belief a matter of indifference. The Liberal who thinks one Creed as good as another would join the largest and most fashionable Church. The true Liberals cannot do this: they remain

outside the great orthodox communities for the sake of the truth which Cardinal Newman thinks that they despise. Liberalism in religion is inconsistent with the recognition of any religion as true in an exclusive and absolute sense".

This Liberalism, so well described by Dr. Drummond, was more developed and understood by the leading Unitarians of the nineteenth century, by Channing in America and Martineau in England, but it is present implicitly, from Baxter onwards, through the congregations and ministers and teachers of the eighteenth century who were moving gradually into Unitarian beliefs.

CHAPTER IX

THE INFLUENCE OF DEISM

A CHARACTERISTIC and important movement of thought in the eighteenth century was what is known as Deism. Unitarians have often been called Deists, and it is necessary to ask how far this is true and how far Deism influenced Unitarian thought. The writers called Deists described themselves as Free Thinkers, and the name Free Thinkers is often regarded in consequence as synonymous with their views. A Free Thinker ought to mean one who believes in freedom of thought as a prerequisite in the study of Religion, as in the study of any other branch of Truth. It is often taken to mean intellectual speculation about religion regarded as something purely external without any personal religion of our own, and even without any desire for a personal religion.

Some Deistic Free Thinkers were inclined to deny the possibility of serious Free Thought to any who did not arrive at their own conclusions. Richard Bentley, the great classical scholar, in his defence of orthodoxy against Collins, says ironically, "If all your free-thinking does not centre in these Deistic opinions, you shall be none of this family. Claim your right as you will, on the terms of the definition, plead that you have thought *freely*, impartially, and carefully upon all these propositions, and that in all of them the force of evidence has drawn you to the contrary side, protest against this foul play that they themselves impose creeds and terms

of communion, that the author, while he rails at all guides, obtrudes himself as a guide to others; all this shall avail you nothing. You shall never be incorporated into the rising and growing sect, till you see that that's the only free thinking, to think just as they do".

It is a noble faith which believes that Free Thinking will lead to Truth and ever more Truth. It is mere bigotry and conceited egoism to imagine that Free Thinking must lead every man to my opinions.

Deism was hardly a sect, certainly it was never a religious sect. Those who were concerned in the movement were mostly attached to the Established Church, and made no effort to alter the forms of Church worship. They wrote independently of one another, and often disagreed with one another. A certain negative, critical attitude towards the Bible was common to them all, and a tendency to which Bentley refers, to believe that true Freedom of thought must lead men to their own conclusions.

It would be undesirable in a History of Unitarianism to give an account in detail of the various Deistical writers, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, John Toland, Anthony Collins, Matthew Tindal, and Lord Shaftesbury. That which was common to them all was a belief in Natural Religion as against Revealed Religion, and a desire to make religion entirely reasonable and free from mystery. Toland's first book, in 1696, marks by its title the general line of thought—"Christianity not mysterious, showing that there is nothing in the Gospel contrary to Reason, nor above it, and that no Christian doctrine can properly be called mysterious". Where Locke had urged "the reasonableness of Christianity", Toland would interpret the word "reasonable" by "not mysterious", which was not in the least what Locke

meant. For the Deists there was no sense of sin, no problem of evil, no mystery of godliness, no things "that eye hath not seen nor ear heard". They did not lose themselves as Sir Thomas Browne loved to do in an *O Altitudo.*

The scientific discoveries of every age tend to mould men's philosophy. These men were under the influence of Newton. They saw the universe as an ordered scheme of law. The conception of universal gravitation gave them their conception of God. They were so impressed with what science had done by observation and logic that they expected to be able to do the same in theology, but they confined their observation and logic to the laws of nature and of human life, without concerning themselves about the inward needs of the soul and its communion with God. They had that deep distrust of History as a source of truth which is sometimes to be found in scientific men. They were inclined to doubt whether ancient books were worthy of careful comment, as though they contained any revelation from God. "In Nature", says Professor Gardner, "some scholars have found only God's truth and in History only man's lies." They had the feeling which Browning expresses in *The Ring and the Book* amidst the contradictory descriptions of the same event:—

> It makes a man despair of History.

They were without the modern view of History as a development of thought, and modern methods of historical criticism were unknown to them. Some of them threw doubts upon prophecy and miracles in the Bible, and even expressed scepticism as to the Virgin Birth, but their main emphasis was on the religion revealed in nature, and on the reasonableness of a belief in God.

They were impatient with Biblical statements and the dogmas which were founded upon them. They wanted a religion for the plain man, and to their minds the Bible did not give it. The mildly pious comments so usual in Natural History books at the end of the eighteenth century, about the goodness of God as shown by the behaviour of animals and the beauty of flowers, and the means provided for them as a protection against enemies, were a relic of the Deistical methods, often adopted by orthodox writers who would have repudiated their views.

Matthew Tindal, 1653–1733, is perhaps the best representative of Deism because he tries to construct a positive religion and is not content with negative criticism. "The religion of Nature", he writes, "is absolutely perfect. Revelation can neither add to nor take from its perfection. The law of Nature shows the highest internal excellence, the greatest plainness, simplicity, unanimity, antiquity, and eternity. It does not depend upon the uncertain meaning of words and phrases in dead languages, much less on types, metaphors, allegories, parables, or on the skill and honesty of weak or designing transcribers (not to mention translators), but on the immutable relation of things always visible to the whole world." Here is seen the suspicion of all historical records, so marked among the Deists, and at the same time, the optimistic confidence that Nature has provided from the first all that man needs, with perfect simplicity and absolute certainty, for a full knowledge of God.

Bishop Butler's famous *Analogy of Religion* was a reply to that argument. It pointed out the difficulties of Natural Religion and that Revealed Religion was necessary in order to explain the difficulties of

Natural Religion. "You assert", he said in effect, "that the law of Nature is absolutely perfect. I will show you that precisely the same difficulties are to be found in Nature as in Revelation." It was a dangerous argument. Martineau has said that the *Analogy* "contains, with a design directly opposite, the most terrible persuasives to atheism that have ever been produced". If read, however, in relation to the Deism which called it forth, it is seen to be a powerful argument. Its essential meaning is that religion based on Nature is by itself not merely inadequate, but full of contradictions, that the boasted simplicity of Nature is not there, and that History and human experiences, although they too present difficulties of interpretation, are essential in considering the meaning of religion and God's purposes for men.

J. J. Tayler well sums up the characteristics of Deism. "The writings of these old Free Thinkers have left no very deep impression on the public mind. Deism is the religion of the individual reason, isolated and self-relying: arriving by its own efforts, through the contemplation of secondary causes, at the idea of a supreme Intelligence: disdaining the traditions of the past, and taking its independent stand on the knowledge of the present. Such a religion, though many wise and virtuous men have entertained it, is essentially anti-social: for it is remarkable that while the most extravagant enthusiasm has often given birth to extensive sects, Deism has never yet coalesced into a permanent religious society. It seeks the primary element of the religious life in an inference from external phenomena, and admits into its belief only so much as can be deduced in regular, logical sequence from that fundamental proposition. We might as well make a theorem

of Euclid a bond of communion and sympathy among men, as a religion so conceived. . . . It labours under deficiencies which only historical religion can supply. It has no Christ. It needs some link for the human soul, through human sympathies with the unseen God: a centre of living union, a bond of universal brotherhood. It has no usages, no institutions, no cherished remembrances; no light from the past, shedding its hallowed lustre on particular spots and recurring scenes, and consecrating our daily life with the spirit of sacred poetry. Its doctrines fade away into dim abstractions, remote from the sympathies of warm, living, suffering humanity."

The Congregations in the eighteenth century, who were moving towards Unitarianism, were certainly not Deists. They had a reverence for Christ, a belief in the Bible, a feeling of the importance of historic Christianity, quite as great as that of the orthodox. They differed from them in their interpretation of the nature of Christ and the meaning of the Bible, but Unitarianism remained, essentially, a Historical Religion. They may have learnt from the Deists a deeper respect for the make of the world, and for the human reason as fitted by God to understand it. They may have learnt from them to criticize the Bible more freely, and to interpret it more courageously, in accordance with their ideas of reason and morality. They may have learnt from them that heathen nations who knew not the Bible might yet, by the light of reason and by natural religion, attain to a saving knowledge of God. But whatever the influence of Deism upon them, they were certainly not Deists. Whatever kindly words of partial sympathy some Deists may have used about Christianity they stood outside it, and, in their own opinion, above it.

The Unitarians of the eighteenth century were neither outside nor above Christianity. They believed in reason and conscience, they believed that God revealed Himself in the world that He had made, but they believed supremely in the revelation of God to be found in the Bible, and, above all, in the character and teaching of Jesus Christ.

There may have been a certain want of spiritual imagination and fervour, a certain hard, dry element in their theology, but this was not peculiar to themselves. It is the characteristic of eighteenth-century theology. To be an enthusiast was to be a fanatic, or still worse a Methodist. Whatever the orthodox might say about Unitarians, they did not call them enthusiasts: they knew that they were sober-minded effective citizens, reasonable beings, with a strong sense of responsibility to God and men and a deep sincerity of conviction. This type of religion may lack something, but it was a failing common to the time, and it ill becomes the Anglicans or orthodox Nonconformists to call Unitarians cold. The theological temperature of the time was low: men could rise to fever heat in theological discussion, but there was not much religious warmth in those who wrote about the love of God or the ideals of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER X

NONCONFORMITY AND EDUCATION

THE Nonconformists belonged on the whole to the commercial classes; they were public-spirited, energetic men engaged in business and interested in the affairs of the world. They were God-fearing men with a sense of responsibility to their families, their town, and their nation. They were not, for the most part, landed gentry or members of the nobility whose tendency is to keep things as they are, nor were they generally poor people, without hope of worldly advantages except through revolution. They were men who sought to improve their condition. They believed in progress, they were not afraid of change. They were not conservatives, and they were not revolutionaries. They were individualists and liberals who wanted freedom for growth and who believed in themselves.

J. J. Tayler says, "Through all ages we trace a constant intimate sympathy between new developments of the religious principles and the spirit of commerce. The merchants of London were zealously devoted to the cause of Nonconformity. We have another proof of this relationship in the employment of the halls of different Companies as meeting places for the first Congregations that were gathered in London. Salters' Hall and the Weigh House, which were anciently connected with the Grocers' Company, were Meeting Houses of notoriety in London. They were fitted up with pews and galleries and pulpits by the zeal of the citizens, who thus signalized

their devotion to what they deemed the general cause of religious truth and freedom. Their form, dimensions, and general appearance, capacious, massive, and plain, and venerable for a sort of gloomy simplicity, have probably furnished the type of the old Dissenting Meeting House".

These men, believing as they did in reason and righteousness, full of vigour and initiative, with large families, wanting to make their way in the world, believed in an education which was both religious and secular, helping their children to make the best of both worlds, to get on in this life, and to remember always the life that is to come. The Presbyterian Nonconformists were not ascetics who ignored the values of this world and whose mind was wholly set on things above. It is to the honour of the two thousand clergymen, and the innumerable men and women who followed them, that they gave up positions and privileges which they valued. The Nonconforming clergy gave up their livings; the Nonconforming laity gave up their opportunities of education and of public service. They could no longer send their children to the Public Schools, and the Universities were closed to them. In the "Act of Uniformity" it was laid down that "all Parsons, Vicars, Curates, Lecturers, and every Schoolmaster keeping any public or private school, and every person instructing youth in any private family, shall subscribe a declaration, including among other things, a promise to conform to the Liturgy of the Church of England as it is now by law established". "The Five Mile Act" further imposed an oath that it was not lawful upon any pretences whatever to take arms against the King, and that such as should refuse the oath should be incapable of teaching in any public or private schools, or of taking

any boarders to be taught or instructed under pain of forty pounds, one-third to the King, one-third to the poor, and one-third to him who should sue for it.

Notwithstanding this encouragement to informers and a further Act "to prevent the growth of schism", which was to come into force the very day Queen Anne died, Nonconformist teachers managed to carry on schools and seminaries, and under George I it became a recognized practice.

So far as Oxford and Cambridge were concerned, they made themselves inaccessible to any sincere Nonconformist. In 1622, and again in 1683, Oxford University proclaimed the doctrine of passive obedience and decreed that "all persons promoted to degrees were to take an oath that they not only detested the opposite opinion, but would at no future time entertain it".[1]

This exclusion of Dissenters was one cause of the falling off of learning both among tutors and students during the eighteenth century in our two old Universities. Gibbon, who entered Oxford in 1752, says in his autobiography that the time spent there "proved the most idle and unprofitable in his whole life", and that "except for the candidates for fellowships, public exercises and examinations were utterly unknown". The tutors and professors grossly neglected their duty. "From the toil of reading or thinking or writing, the fellows had absolved their consciences. Their conversation stagnated in a round of College business, Tory politics, and private scandal, while their dull and deep potations increased the intemperance of youth." Adam Smith is equally emphatic. "In the University of Oxford",

[1] Most of the graduates broke this oath at the Revolution, but when William and Mary were securely established, "they relapsed to their ancient mood".

he says, "the greater part of the public professors have for these many years given up altogether the practice of teaching." "The youths neither are taught nor always can find any proper means of being taught the sciences which it is the business of these incorporated bodies to teach." Lord Chesterfield, too, writing to an Irish friend in 1749, about Dublin University, says, "Our two Universities at least will do it no harm, unless by their examples. This one (Cambridge) is sunk into the lowest obscurity, and the existence of Oxford would not be known if it were not for the treasonable spirit publicly avowed and often exerted there". Wordsworth, too, who went up to St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1787, bears the same witness, though in gentler words, and taking some blame to himself for having gained so little from his University. What he did gain was not due to anything his tutors taught him.

> Beside the pleasant Mill of Trompington
> I laughed with Chaucer in the hawthorn shade;
> And that gentle Bard,
> Sweet Spenser, moving through his clouded heaven
> With the moon's beauty and the moon's soft pace.
> Yea, our blind Poet, who in his later day,
> Stood almost single—
> I seemed to see him here
> Familiarly, and in his scholar's dress.

It was the communion with great poets which Wordsworth felt at Cambridge and with Newton's statue in Trinity Chapel—

> With his prism and silent face,
> The marble index of a mind for ever
> Voyaging through strange seas of Thought alone.

And yet, as he says elsewhere in the *Prelude*, looking back on Cambridge days:—

> Yet I, though used
> In magisterial liberty to rove,
> could shadow forth a place
> Whose studious aspect should have bent me down
> To instantaneous service; should at once
> Have made me pay to science and to arts
> And written lore, acknowledged my liege lord,
> A homage frankly offered up, like that
> Which I had paid to Nature.

It was during this period that Nonconformist education was most flourishing. Miss Parker, in her book on *Dissenting Academies in England*, says, "The change from the energetic grammar schools of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries to the decaying and lifeless ones of the seventeenth and eighteenth is so remarkable that it has been considered as the chief feature of the period. And the schools which make those years really interesting and noteworthy have been overlooked. The Dissenting Academies were the greatest schools of their day. During a period when the grammar schools slept and the Universities were sterile, the Dissenting Academies were not merely in existence, but were thoroughly alive and active. An inquiry into the state of education between 1660 and 1800 shows us that they stood immeasurably higher, as regards efficiency, than any other educational institutions. Without the story of the Dissenting Academies, the history of education in England for those one hundred and forty years would indeed be a dull and barren record".

Miss Parker gives three reasons for their success. "First, Nonconformist ministers and laymen would not allow their sons to go to the Universities, where they

would have to subscribe to the Act of Uniformity. Secondly, just as the ejected clergy were among the best in the country, so the ejected teachers were amongst the most efficient and progressive, many of them, in 1662, having been tutors at Oxford or Cambridge. Thirdly, the effect of the legislation on the existing schools and Universities was felt, and in order to obtain the best education, Anglicans as well as Nonconformists were soon sent to the Academies of the Dissenters, which, requiring no oath of belief in any doctrine, were open to every one."

"No true conception of the importance of these academies can be formed unless it be understood that though first starting practically even with the grammar schools, they outstripped not only these schools in efficiency and influence, but having afterwards adopted University subjects and methods, they even outstripped the Universities also."

"The Academies", says Miss Parker, "may be divided into three classes. (1) Those of the first period, 1663 to about 1690, founded by ejected ministers, in which, as a rule, there was only one tutor; (2) those founded 1691–1750, in which there were several tutors, and which were more 'public' than the early ones; and, (3) those founded about 1750, which gave, in addition to a professional training, a good general education to youths going into business."

These Academies were not Socinian or Unitarian in doctrine. Richard Frankland (born 1630), who founded the first private Academy at Rathmell in 1669, wrote what Calamy called "a valuable piece in print against Socinianism". Clegg, in writing of his studies under Chorlton, at the first Manchester Academy, says: "The writings of Socinus and his followers made little impres-

sion on me: only I could never after be entirely reconciled to the common doctrine of the Trinity".

Philip Doddridge (1702–51) is perhaps the most famous and typical tutor in the middle of the eighteenth century. He was educated at the Independent Academy of Kibworth under Dr. Jennings. He writes of Jennings while a student at his Academy, "He encourages the greatest freedom of inquiry, and always inculcates it as a law that the Scriptures are the only standard of faith. I have almost finished Mr. Jennings's system of divinity, and the better I am acquainted with it the more I admire it. He does not entirely accord with any particular body of men, but is sometimes a Calvinist, sometimes a Remonstrant, sometimes a Baxterian, sometimes a Socinian, as truth and evidence determines him. He furnishes us with all kinds of authors upon every subject, without advising us to skip the heretical passages from fear of infection. It is evidently his main care to inspire us with sentiments of Catholicism".

Doddridge was minister and tutor at the Northampton Academy from 1729 to his death in 1751. Alexander Gordon points out that "he was the first of theological tutors to lecture in English. It was a great innovation. It meant much more than relief from a tiresome linguistic strain". A second characteristic of Doddridge, pointed out by Mr. Gordon, is that "he was the founder of what might be called a science of comparative Theology". The older method had consisted in the lecturer expounding the doctrines of his own school or Church, and comparing other views or doctrines with his own, of course, to their disadvantage. Doddridge, on the other hand, began "by laying before his pupils with all the fairness of which he was master, the various views which had been entertained upon the point and the

arguments adduced in their favour. These he proceeded to compare, measuring them one against another, weighing their merits, trying them by Scripture, by reason, by each other, with the object, if possible, of eliciting the truth". This method he urged his pupils to follow for themselves.

No doubt it is possible for such a method to lead a lecturer consciously or unconsciously to prove that his own doctrines are the only true ones. If he has strong preliminary convictions the freedom of the method may turn out to be illusory. On the other hand, such a method, if it means the complete suppression of the lecturer's own beliefs, may irritate or bewilder students by leaving them helpless in a mass of heterogeneous opinions. But this method, pursued by a fair-minded, sympathetic teacher, anxious to understand every school of thought and every Church doctrine, and to give full weight to opinions hostile to his own, is the wisest and most helpful method, if the lecturer does not make himself into what Emerson calls "a mush of concession". This is the method which later Liberal Theological Colleges have preserved. It does not mean that the lecturer hides his own opinions or sinks his own personality. It means that he does not lay down the law or speak dogmatically. He is content to let his students decide for themselves between his own views, which he states quite clearly, and the views of other schools and Churches, which he sets before them with the fullest sympathy and understanding of which he is capable.

Doddridge was himself, probably, quite orthodox, but it might be said that through his teaching he was the occasion of unorthodoxy in others. He says of himself, "I have lately the character of a very orthodox divine: but to my great mortification I hear from another

quarter that my sermons are all Do! Do! Do! To speak my sentiments without reserve, I think the one too favourable and the other too severe". His daughter said of him, "The orthodoxy my father taught his children was charity". That striking testimony to his catholicity of spirit is borne out by his own words: "Every benevolent and useful man in society I love and honour as such, whether he be or be not a Christian".

The successor to Doddridge's Academy at Northampton was that at Daventry, which was a development in form, being managed, not by the tutor but by a small body of Independent ministers and laymen called the Coward Trustees. Joseph Priestley was educated at Daventry, "and the history of Daventry Academy culminated", says Mr. Gordon, "in the divinity tutorship of Thomas Belsham, who, by following Doddridge's comparative method in theology, was brought to the point of identifying himself (1789) with the rising movement of Unitarianism under Lindsey". Priestley's description of Daventry Academy is significant. "In my time", he says, "the Academy was in a state peculiarly favourable to the serious pursuit of truth, as the students were about equally divided upon all the articles of theological orthodoxy and heresy. Our tutors also were of different opinions: Dr. Ashworth taking the orthodox side of every question and Mr. Clarke, the sub-tutor, that of heresy, though always with the greatest modesty. Our lectures had often the air of friendly conversation on the subject to which they related. We were referred to authors on both sides of every question, and even required to give an account of them."

We must not follow the history of these and other Academies in further detail. Some of them died out in the eighteenth century, others are the ancestors of

modern Nonconformist Colleges. The Academy which is of special interest to Unitarians is that founded at Warrington through the efforts of the Rev. John Seddon, minister in that town, 1753–5. Subscriptions were raised by business men in the north of England, and on January 30, 1757, "proposals for carrying into execution a plan for the liberal education of youth" were definitely considered, trustees were appointed, and a staff of teachers installed.

"The Academy opened with three students, on October 20, 1757. The entries averaged fourteen a year; 393 students being trained there during its short existence, 1757–83. An analysis of the students taking various courses during this period gives the following results:—

Entered for Law	22
Medicine	24
Divinity	52
Commerce	98
Courses not specified	197"

Among the tutors were well-known scholars and thinkers. Dr. Aikin (father of Mrs. Barbauld), Dr. Priestley, Gilbert Wakefield, and Dr. Enfield. In the *Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* (vol. xi) there is the following statement, which is probably not exaggerated. "At Warrington Academy were collected some of the noblest literati of their days. Here the free thought of Presbyterianism first began to crystallize into the Unitarian Theology. Here, for a time, was the centre of the Liberal politics and the literary taste of the entire country."

"In 1783", says Miss Parker, "it was decided to open a new Academy in Manchester, and the Warrington

Academy, which had done such magnificent work for about five-and-twenty years, was closed. The Academy in Manchester called Manchester New College[1] was closely connected with the Warrington Academy. The Warrington Library was transferred to Manchester: the first principal, Dr. Barnes, was trained at Warrington, and the second, the Rev. S. Walker, had been a tutor there."

At Warrington all the tutors were still Arians. Dr. Priestley says, "The only Socinian in the neighbourhood was Mr. Seddon of Manchester" (second cousin of Mr. Seddon of Warrington), "and we all wondered at him". In the Manchester Academy the development into Unitarianism began to take place. But at Manchester, as at Warrington, the Academy was open to students of every religious denomination, from whom "no test or confession of faith" was required. It was from the Principal, Dr. Barnes, an Arian, that the famous words on the doorway of Manchester College, dear to all its students, were derived. It was he who dedicated the College "To Truth, to Liberty, and to Religion". The principles of Manchester College are identical with the principles of the Free Churches usually known as Unitarian. It asks no questions about the Creed of its students. It inquires only into their moral character and their fitness for the Christian ministry. Both tutors and students are free, and the door is not closed on

[1] Dr. Drummond states in his address at the opening of Manchester College at Oxford that, when first founded, it was called The Manchester Academy, and that it acquired the name Manchester New College after its removal to York. The "New' was dropped when it came to Oxford. It should be noted also that Warrington Academy was closed before Manchester Academy was founded and that the connection between them is not quite so close as Miss Parker suggests.

any sect or creed. Some of its tutors have been members of the English Church, some of its students have become ministers in orthodox Churches. At the same time the freedom from theological tests has generally tended in the direction of Unitarian thought amongst the students, and the tutors, on the whole, have been Unitarians.

There is nothing surprising in this, nor does it prove that the claim to freedom is illusory, or that the welcome to members of all schools of thought is unreal. It is natural that those who believe in Creeds should avoid a creedless College. It is natural that Anglicans should prefer an Anglican College, Baptists a Baptist College, Wesleyans a Wesleyan College. To lay down the principle that Creeds do not matter, and that theology must be studied in a free and reverent spirit, implies the belief that no Creed is final and no orthodoxy satisfactory. Its strongest appeal is to Liberal Christians, Modernists, and Unitarians who seek the truth without fear, and who are unable to accept any orthodoxy as complete and final.

CHAPTER XI

PRIESTLEY AND LINDSEY

BY far the most important name in the History of English Unitarianism until the time of James Martineau is Joseph Priestley, 1733–1804. He was not the founder of English Unitarianism. There was a growing tendency in that direction amongst many of the old Presbyterian Churches, but Priestley's writings and his outspoken, simple honesty encouraged the movement and gave it cohesion and strength. His scientific eminence gave weight and prominence to his theological convictions.

There have been many scientific men of outstanding ability who have written on theological questions, from Sir Isaac Newton down to Sir Oliver Lodge. It by no means follows that a great scientist is qualified to be a great theologian, and there is a danger that a work on theology by a great scientist may acquire an adventitious value. But in the case of Priestley he was a preacher and theologian first, and a scientific man afterwards. His fame no doubt rests, and will continue to rest, on his discoveries in physics, electricity, and chemistry, especially on his discovery of oxygen, but his philosophy and theology, although less widely popular, have had a great and justifiable influence on Unitarianism.

He was an immensely voluminous writer. Hardly a day passed without his committing some thought to paper. His writings have been published by Mr. J. T.

Rutt in twenty-five large volumes. In this he might be compared with Richard Baxter. Nobody would contend that he was entirely accurate in all his work or that he was a profound scholar of the Bible or early Christian History. He may be accused of inaccuracies or of lack of imaginative sympathy and understanding, but he was never superficial. He was a genuine student and an entirely honest man. He may not have seen everything in his subject, but what he saw he saw clearly, and saw it as the result of his own reading and thought. He adopted no popular phrases, and he did not write for popularity. "To refer to a Catalogue of Dr. Priestley's works", says Martineau, "is like consulting the Prospectus of a Cyclopaedia; and it is impossible to remember that they are all the production of an individual without the impression that his mind was more adventurous than profound and its vision more telescopic than microscopic." Martineau also says of him, "That there is such a thing as truth, that it is not placed beyond the reach of human understanding, and that when found it is necessarily pure good, were the first principles of his faith: principles which he did not promulgate in their general form and then reject in their applications, but carried out boldly and without reserve into every topic which invited his research". He was essentially a controversialist, although it would be unfair to say that he loved controversy for its own sake. The reputation which Unitarians gained at the beginning of the nineteenth century for controversy, and for considering everything in the cold light of reason, derives from him. As Martineau says, "He saw in all creeds much error, and hoped that controversy would make them more quickening by making them more pure".

Priestley was brought up in a Calvinistic household by an aunt whom he always revered "as in all respects as perfect a human character as I have yet been acquainted with", a typically clumsy phrase and a typically sincere expression. He was born a heretic and a rationalist. He was distressed that he could not "feel a proper repentance for the sin of Adam". Before he was twenty he had read the Hebrew Bible twice through, once with points, and once without, and had acquired the rudiments of the Chaldaic, Syriac, and Arabic languages. He became a theological student under Ashworth at Daventry, and in that free atmosphere he finally gave up Calvinism and drifted away from orthodox opinion. He adopted Free-will doctrines for a time, but was converted back to the doctrine of Necessity by Hartley's *Observations on Man*, which he ranked next to the Bible in its influence upon him. He became minister in a Presbyterian Chapel at Needham Market in Suffolk at a salary of £30 a year. He had a stammer which he never completely overcame, and this physical disability, united with heterodox opinions inclining to Arianism, made him unpopular. "At Needham", he says, "I felt the effect of a low, despised situation together with that arising from want of popular talents. Even my next neighbour, whose sentiments were as free as my own, and known to be so, declined making exchanges with me. But visiting that country some years after, when I had raised myself to some degree of notice in the world, and being invited to preach in that very pulpit, the same people crowded to hear me, though my elocution was not much improved, and they professed to admire one of the same discourses they had formerly despised." There was nothing of the cynic in Priestley; he states the fact with perfect good humour,

and accepts it as part of the wise workings of Providence, but for those who have not quite the same confidence in everything "being for the best in the best of all possible worlds", it is difficult not to complain when we realize how hard it is for a man's best efforts to win appreciation until he has gained fame in some other direction.

From Needham, Priestley went as minister to Nantwich, where he taught in a school in which he was employed from seven in the morning to seven in the evening, with two short intervals. "And I never gave a holiday on any consideration, the red-letter days, as they are called, excepted." Here he wrote an English Grammar, and engaged in scientific experiments with an air pump and an electrical machine, for the benefit of his scholars. There also he re-wrote *Observations on the Character and Reasoning of the Apostle Paul,* in which he expressed great dissatisfaction with the Apostle as a reasoner. He was not yet a Unitarian, but this was going far beyond the general thought of even the Unitarians of his day. In 1760 Priestley was appointed to be tutor in languages and belles lettres at Warrington Academy. Here he married, and here he first associated with men of ability and leaders in thought. His essay on *Government,* written at Warrington, contains the sentence to which Jeremy Bentham considered himself indebted for his famous phrase "The greatest happiness of the greatest number." While at Warrington he spent a month in London each year, and met with Dr. Price and Dr. Franklin, who encouraged him to pursue his scientific researches and to write his *History of Electricity.* He says, "None of my publications were better received than this, which was the most hasty of them all". Soon afterwards, as a result of some electrical

experiments, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society. In 1767 he removed to Leeds to become minister of Mill Hill Chapel. Here he became a definite Unitarian, believing in the simple humanity of Jesus. This result was partly due to his reading of Dr. Lardner on *The Logos*. His later history must be passed over rapidly. He became literary companion and secretary to Lord Shelburne in 1772 for seven years, receiving a good salary, and having much freedom to continue his theological and scientific studies. In 1780 he became minister of the New Meeting Society, Birmingham, and remained there as a much honoured and beloved minister until 1791, when his chapel, his house and library, and many valuable instruments and MSS. were destroyed by a Birmingham mob, incited by ecclesiastical and civic authorities. He had joined with his friend, Dr. Price of London, in expressing much sympathy for the French Revolution. He regarded it as a great awakening of the human spirit and a decisive blow struck for liberty. Dr. Price's speeches induced Burke to write his famous letter condemning the French Revolution. Most Liberals will sympathize with Dr. Price's views as against Burke's, but few can be so illiberal as to deny the greatness and permanent value of Burke's letter. It was intended to refute ideas and enthusiasms which we can still regard as admirable, in spite of the excesses of the Revolution, and yet, the refutation through the genius of its author has become a classic of English Constitutional History.

In the case of Priestley the reply to his enlightened love of liberty was mere mob violence and brutality. No doubt his avowed Unitarianism had something to do with the attack. Priestley had a way of expressing himself which is peculiarly irritating to the ignorant

and intolerant. He said exactly what he thought: he concealed nothing: he palliated nothing. He was never angry or irritated or bitter himself. He did not try to score a victory by misrepresentations. He said simply in theology, as in science, what seemed to him to be the truth. He did not apologize for his heresies. He wrote with calmness and conviction, as if what he said would naturally appeal to reasonable men. That quiet, firm temper is bitterly opposed by unreasonable men. They prefer a man who is on his defence, who gives the impression of being a little afraid of them, who admits that he is in a minority and deplores the fact and is even, perhaps, a little ashamed of it. Priestley never troubled himself about being in a minority. He neither boasted of it as the cynic is inclined to do, nor regretted it because he desired popularity.

Priestley was a convinced Necessarian in philosophy. It was for him a working faith. He believed that God ordained everything that happened to him, and that God was absolutely good. Such a belief, when truly held, enables a man to bear whatever evil comes upon him without bitterness or complaint. Priestley did not pose as a martyr. He felt no anger towards his enemies. He was essentially magnanimous. He was "able to endure as seeing Him who is invisible". His conviction was unbroken and his serenity undisturbed.

While it is easy to understand how a confident belief in divine Providence as determining everything enables a man to bear whatever happens with a quiet mind, it is much more difficult to understand how a man finds motives for action in such a belief, or reasons for responsibility. Nevertheless, it is beyond question that many Determinists have been remarkable for intense energy and have been enthusiastic reformers, working

for Liberty, and deeply conscious of their own responsibility for the power with which they have been endowed. Priestley was one of the leaders of his age on behalf both of civil and religious liberty.

He was on the side of the Americans in their conflict with the English Government. He was on the side of the French Republic at the Revolution. He condemned the slave trade, and he strove for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. He was not a politician in the sense in which his friend Dr. Price was a politician, and he states he was never a member of any political club. His main interests were in science and theology, but he was a firm believer in freedom of thought. He was a convinced Unitarian, and he did more for Unitarianism in his time than any other man, but he had no desire to impose his faith, in the form of a creed, on any Church. He was more concerned with convincing the French sceptics with whom he came in contact with the truth of religion, than of convincing English Trinitarians with the truth of Unitarianism. He was even more concerned to prove to both of them that the way to truth was through freedom of thought. "His tendency", says Martineau, "was much more to dogmatism than to doubt; a dogmatism, however, which, if occasionally manifesting itself after investigation, never manifested itself before."

Priestley's Unitarianism was in some respects in advance of his time. He denied the miraculous birth of Jesus, and thought that he was born at Nazareth with the same physical, mental, and moral imperfections as other human beings, and that his character was only gradually formed and improved. This was going beyond the Scriptural Unitarianism, which continued to be the prevalent type down to the time of Martineau. It meant

a doubt of the accuracy of the Gospels, just as in his earlier writings on St. Paul he had doubted the inspired character of the Apostle's reasoning. In these views he anticipated modern Biblical criticism, without, however, any detailed or profound study of the text. On the other hand, he accepted the miracle of the Resurrection, as all Unitarians did at that time. As Leslie Stephen says of him, "He abandoned the mysterious, and yet retained the supernatural element in Christianity". Modern Unitarianism, as represented by Martineau, is the reverse of this. Of Dr. Martineau it might be said, as of all the best Unitarian thought, "It abandoned the supernatural, and yet retained the mystical element in Christianity". He regarded the doctrines of the Trinity and the Atonement as corruptions of primitive Christianity, and he had slight regard for the early Fathers, and still less for Church Councils. He was not inclined to look for any underlying truth in orthodox doctrines. They were mere errors, no doubt, according to his philosophy, necessary errors, but the time had now come for them to be swept away. He had even less respect for them than St. Paul had for the law. In the light of reason and of Scripture rationally understood, they were seen not only to be, but always to have been, perversions of the truth. They were condemned without bitterness indeed, but they were condemned without sympathy. That attitude of mind was the prevalent one among Unitarians under his influence down to the time of Channing and Martineau. He died in 1804 in Northumberland, Pennsylvania, whither he had emigrated, to live in a freer atmosphere and to be near his sons, in 1794. For most men it would have been a painful exile, but for Priestley it was a time of quiet, continued activity and of a peaceful old age. He was working to

the last. Less than an hour before his death he dictated with great precision some emendations for a posthumous publication, adding, "I have now done". He lived and died supported by his religion. There was no distinction between his thought and his character.

The second outstanding name in English Unitarianism of this period is Theophilus Lindsey (1723–1808), a very different type of character from Priestley, but united to him in the closest bonds of friendship for many years. Priestley had been a Dissenter from early youth, Lindsey was by training and temper a devoted Churchman. Priestley was a rationalist who welcomed controversy as the way to truth, Lindsey was a gentle spiritual character who shrank from controversy. Priestley devoted his spare time and thought to science and theology, Lindsey gave his spare time and money to charity and work among the poor.

Dissent at this time was, on the whole, more orthodox than Anglicanism. There was more theological speculation and more advanced doctrine in the English Church than in Nonconformity. It was triumphantly asserted by Dr. Palmer in the early part of the eighteenth century that "amid the troops of Unitarian and Socinian writers not one Dissenter is found" (*A Vindication of the Learning of the Dissenters*). This was less true towards the end of the eighteenth century, but there were undoubtedly many in the Anglican Church who shared the views of William Whiston and Samuel Clarke. One of the chief of these was the Rev. F. Blackburne, Archdeacon of Cleveland, who in 1766 published anonymously a book called *The Confessional*, in which he argued against Creeds and demanded freedom from subscription. Lindsey had married Blackburne's step-daughter, and was in close sympathy with him. Black-

burne had arrived at the position that "he would not renew his subscription to gain the wealth of the Indies or the honour and power of the Popedom", and he therefore rejected all preferment, but he had no intention of leaving the Church. His efforts were directed to obtaining freedom from subscription.

A Petition for Relief from Subscription was drawn up by Blackburne, Lindsey, and others in 1772. It is known as the "Feathers' Petition", from the tavern in the Strand where its promoters met. As drafted by Blackburne, it proposed to free the clergy of the Establishment from any requirement "to acknowledge by subscription or declaration the truth of any formulary of religious faith or doctrine whatsoever beside Holy Scripture itself". Only 197 clergymen signed it, although no doubt many others were in general sympathy. The Rev. William Paley, afterwards so well known for his book on *The Evidence of Revealed Religion*, is reported to have declined to sign because "he could not afford to keep a conscience". The House of Commons debated the petition from three o'clock to eleven on February 6, 1772, and rejected it by 217 votes to 71, Burke being amongst its strongest opponents. Such a petition would have no chance of acceptance even to-day. The wonder is that it obtained so many votes. The petitioners regarded the result as a moral victory, but it left the situation for tender consciences exactly where it was before. Blackburne and most of the others who had signed the petition were content with their "moral victory" and the protest they had made. Lindsey could not be content. By his own reading and thought he had arrived at a belief in the pure humanity of Jesus, without passing through Arianism, and he was convinced from his study of the Bible that nowhere in the

Scripture is the term God in any sense applied to Christ.

In 1773, at the age of fifty, Lindsey left the Church of England, having decided that he could no longer repeat the Creeds or accept the Articles. When he gave up his living at Catterick in Yorkshire he and his wife had only thirty pounds a year. "Former friends looked coldly upon them, and some were not sparing in loud and strong expressions of disapprobation of what they were pleased to term the precipitancy and imprudence of his conduct in abandoning a situation of respectability and influence in the Church" (Belsham's *Life*, p. 56).

Dr. Priestley and Dr. Price were, however, zealous friends, and some wealthy laymen, especially two Yorkshiremen, Samuel Shore and Robert Newton, gave financial help. Lindsey's design was to open a chapel in London for the worship of the One God, the Father of Jesus Christ. A room in Essex House, Essex Street, was found and fitted up, and later a chapel was built upon the same site, where Lindsey ministered for many years to what was described, in the language of the time, as "large and respectable congregations". There were, of course, other chapels in London at the time, with the old Presbyterian tradition, whose ministers and congregations were practically Unitarians, but Essex Chapel was from the first avowedly and definitely Unitarian.

Lindsey's hope and aim was to set up a movement which would attract liberal members of the Church of England. He was glad to receive help and sympathy from Presbyterian Dissenters, but his aim was, with the help of a reformed liturgy, to supply the needs of liberal Churchmen. He hoped that many other clergymen would follow his example. He hoped that

the considerable section of liberal laymen in the Anglican Church whose views were practically Unitarian would join the new movement. In this he was disappointed. There was no Exodus. He was a Moses without a following. It is very hard to persuade men who love the Church of England to leave it on doctrinal grounds.

John Henry Newman had the same experience. He probably expected a large number of High Churchmen to follow his example, and certainly the Roman Catholics of the time expected it. There were a certain number of conversions to Rome as a consequence of Newman's conversion, but the great majority of the High Churchmen remained where they were. Newman's action might be logical, but it was not convincing. The English Church has a hold upon its members which is stronger than logic. Once only in its history, in 1662, have clergymen and laity in large numbers broken away from the Establishment. It was not logic then, or mere doctrinal differences, but a passionate devotion to civil and religious liberty, which was the motive force.

Lindsey's hope of a reformed Anglican Church on Unitarian lines of theology was doomed to failure. He had no ambition to be a leader and no capacity for leadership. The ambition sometimes exists without the capacity, and the capacity without the ambition. In Lindsey's case there was no disappointment of thwarted ambition or unrecognized capacity. He was deeply beloved, and his ministry at Essex Chapel was, in the language of the time, "greatly blessed". He had a large and respectable congregation, men and women of high character, zealous workers for civil and religious liberty, devout in spirit, generous in action, intelligent in mind. The Church stood more definitely than any other in

London for Unitarianism, in the sense that God was regarded as the sole object of worship.

It was, of course, a purely Biblical Unitarianism. The belief in what Dr. Priestley called "the simple humanity of Jesus Christ" was defended and proved from the Scriptures. The whole argument depended, as it seemed, both to Unitarian and Trinitarian, on the Bible.

There is no more interesting and striking example in controversy of an underlying argument unconsciously at work, behind and within the ostensible argument. The Unitarians of Priestley's and Lindsey's time imagined themselves influenced entirely by the Bible, and dependent for their theology entirely on the Bible. They believed that the "simple humanity" of Jesus was proved by the Bible. Quite unconsciously they were under the influence of a severe rationalism and a higher morality, which in the end would reject many of the old doctrines, not because they were non-Biblical, but because they were not true. In the time of Lindsey and Priestley that which was felt to be intellectually unreasonable and morally undesirable was disproved out of the Bible—often with great ingenuity, sometimes with forced arguments, sometimes with real cogency. There is a great deal of unorthodoxy in the Bible, and the Unitarians have done service in drawing attention to it. But there is considerable support for orthodoxy in St. John's Gospel and St. Paul's Epistles.

> Some call the chess-board white,
> Some call it black.

As a fact, it is chequered white and black, which is just what orthodox and unorthodox refused to recognize about the Bible at this time. There were preconceptions on both sides. Orthodoxy had its Creeds and its Articles

in the light of which it interpreted the Bible; Unitarianism had a dislike of mystery, a love for plain common sense, a desire to see things clearly and reasonably, which prejudiced it against doctrines like those of the Incarnation or Atonement. This predisposition, as it became aware of itself, led in time to far more drastic criticism of the Bible and to a better understanding of the true foundation of religion as it was expressed by Martineau, but it must be remembered that in the Biblical Unitarianism of Priestley and Lindsey that spirit was at work half-consciously, and was preparing the way for a fuller development later on.

Lindsey's movement, so far as it was an attempt to attract liberal Churchmen, failed. The Essex Chapel became one of the liberal Nonconformist Congregations in London, and shared in their life and fellowship. It partook of their weaknesses and of their strength. In the next chapter, the general character of Unitarianism in England and America down to the time of Channing and Martineau must be described.

CHAPTER XII

UNITARIANISM IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

ONE important element in the life of Unitarian Congregations in the early nineteenth century consisted in their strugglefor civil liberty. The ministers and members of these Congregations were almost exclusively Liberals in politics, as well as Liberals in religion. This gave them a cohesion which Unitarians at the present day do not possess. They looked at the things of this world, and the things which are beyond and above this world, in the same way. This homogeneousness of thought and aim gave them great strength. It would probably be true to say that the intellectual quality and the spiritual appeal of the Unitarian preachers, from the time of Priestley and Lindsey to the time of Martineau, is considerably inferior to the preaching of the last fifty years of the nineteenth century. The sermons of Priestley, Lindsey, Belsham, and other Unitarian divines of the early nineteenth century are dull reading, and do not compare in permanent beauty or value with Martineau or Thom or Tayler or Beard or Drummond or Armstrong. And yet the congregations in those early days were knit more closely together, and were composed of a body of worshippers who represented a larger proportion of the most intellectual and devout and enlightened citizens in their respective towns than is the case to-day. These men and women were united, not merely by a theological belief, but by a political and

social ideal. They were on the side of emancipation from civil and religious bonds. They worked for the emancipation of the slave, for the emancipation of the Roman Catholic, for the emancipation of the Jew, for the education and emancipation of the proletariat. They worked, of course, for their own emancipation as well. It is a legitimate boast to say that the principles on which they rested their own claims to freedom were fearlessly applied by them to the claims of all other oppressed Churches and classes. They sought no privileged position for themselves. Their demand for religious freedom was based on a profound belief in freedom, not only as the way to truth, but as the means for good government. The toleration which they desired for others they freely gave.

That belief in civil and religious liberty had been present, to some extent, in all Nonconformity since 1662, but it may be justifiably claimed that among no community of Churches was it so clearly and strongly and consistently held as among the Unitarians of the first part of the nineteenth century.

It must be remembered that the so-called "Toleration Act" of 1689 was a very incomplete toleration. It excluded from toleration "all who should deny, in preaching or writing, the doctrine of the Trinity as declared in the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, but compelled all preachers to subscribe to those Articles, so that Unitarians and Roman Catholics were alike excluded". Such laws were not often enforced, but they were a humiliating threat and a possible danger.

In March 1792 the Unitarians presented a petition to Parliament, in which they declared their position by saying they conceived it to be "their duty to examine

into and interpret the Holy Scriptures for themselves, and their right publicly to declare the result of their inquiries".

Twenty years later the memorable Act "to relieve persons who infringe the doctrine of the Holy Trinity from certain penalties" became law. The Act received the Royal Assent on July 21, 1813, and on July 30th a special general meeting of the Unitarian Book Society was held at Essex Street Chapel, when the following resolutions were adopted:—

(1) "That the members of this Society view with great satisfaction the recent success of a measure which more than twenty years ago they solicited in vain, though supported by the transcendent abilities of the late Mr. Fox, and they congratulate themselves and the friends of civil and religious liberty in general, that by this Bill persons who profess their dissent from the doctrine of the Trinity are no longer exposed to severe and ruinous penalties, but are placed under the protection of the law.

(2) "That the members of the Society hail the present measure as an auspicious prelude to that happy day when all penal laws and political restrictions on religious grounds shall be for ever abolished—when an insidious and limited toleration shall give way to universal religious Liberty: and when all, without distinction, shall be entitled by law to the possession of those civil and political privileges which are the birthright of Britons."

The second of these two resolutions expresses the spirit and aims of the Unitarians of that time. Their worship of the One God the Father, their refusal to impose Creeds as a bond of religious fellowship, were indissolubly united with a demand for civil and political

liberty for all. If men and women can worship God without accepting a particular creed, surely they can take part in the government of their country or the management of their town without accepting a particular creed. It was a strong position, and was maintained by Unitarians, and by Unitarians almost alone, in its full extent. It meant emancipation for citizens from all creedal bonds. It included even Atheists in its sweep, as was seen by the Unitarian support of Bradlaugh when he refused to take an oath upon the Bible.

In 1819 "The Unitarian Association for the Protection of the Civil Rights of Unitarians" was formed. It concerned itself chiefly with disabilities of Dissenters generally in relation to the marriage laws, under which marriage was legal only when solemnized in the Established Church, and with Corporation and Test Acts which excluded Dissenters from many offices solely upon religious grounds. It was hoped that orthodox Dissenters would support their efforts, but prejudice against Unitarian views kept them apart, and shortly after led to definite antagonism.

Owing to circumstances for which neither party was entirely to blame, there was a serious conflict of interests between Unitarians and orthodox Dissenters during the first part of the nineteenth century. As a result of the increase of Arian and Unitarian opinions in the Free Trust chapels, there had been in many towns a secession of orthodox members. The majority in many cases were the liberals, so that the more conservative though not actually driven out, found themselves out of place, and were compelled to build themselves new chapels of their own. The old chapels and the old endowments which were originally possessed by ancestors at least as orthodox as themselves, had to be left in the hands of

a liberal majority who had diverged from the beliefs of their forefathers. These orthodox secessionists felt themselves unjustly treated. The situation rankled in their minds. They said they were the rightful inheritors of these old chapels and endowments. The chapels were built by men who believed in the Trinity and accepted the Creeds and the Articles. The endowments were left by men who were thoroughly orthodox. Our ancestors, they said, would be shocked if they could have known that all their labour and self-denial had ended in providing a home and a living for heretics. They never imagined that the Free Trust would lead to such a perversion of their efforts. "We are driven out into the wilderness, and have to build new chapels with new endowments, and yet it is we who are the legitimate representatives of the founders of these Trusts. These heretics have no right to their possession."

Of course, it was not always the heretics who were in the majority. When they were in a minority it was they who had to secede and build new chapels and create new endowments. In these cases the position was clear, and there were no disputes. But there were a considerable number of cases where the liberals were in a majority, and where the orthodox had to secede. In 1816 there was an attempt to recover the Wolverhampton Chapel for orthodoxy. The case dragged on for many years with varying fortunes, but it created antagonism between orthodox Dissenters and Unitarians, and gave to the latter a growing sense of insecurity and to the former a deepened sense of injustice. The conflict came to a head in the famous "Hewley" case.

Sarah Hewley, of the Presbyterian Congregation in York, had in 1704 and later left certain Trust funds to found charities for "poor and godly preachers of

Christ's holy Gospel" and others. The Congregation at York had become Unitarian, and the trustees who administered the Lady Hewley Fund were, for the most part, Unitarians, and the income of the Trust was to a considerable extent being used to help poor Unitarian ministers. The Independents, in 1830, instituted a law-suit to recover possession of these funds. They pointed out that Lady Hewley was an orthodox Dissenter, that the original trustees were orthodox Dissenters, and that the original recipients were orthodox Dissenters. It was true indeed that "poor and godly preachers of Christ's holy Gospel" contained no fixed doctrinal formula, but it was morally certain that Lady Hewley intended her charity for orthodox Dissenters, and that the absence of doctrinal definitions did not imply that she ever imagined or desired that the fund should be administered in the future by Unitarians for the benefit of Unitarians. They argued that at the time the fund was founded Unitarianism was illegal, and that although it had since been legalized, this did not affect the original purpose of the fund, or make its use by Unitarians any less illegal now.

The Unitarians, on the other hand, argued that as no orthodox limitation had been inserted, none was intended. They even suggested that as no doctrinal limitation had been inserted in this and other Open Trusts, it was quite clear that the founders of these Trusts expected, and even desired, a change of doctrine in the direction of Unitarianism. This was manifestly absurd, and the case was decided against the Unitarians in one court after another, until at last it was finally settled by the House of Lords in 1842 that "no Trust might be held for any purpose which was illegal at the time when the Trust was established". The Unitarian

trustees were therefore removed, and the Trust was placed in the hands of trustees from the three orthodox denominations.

The immediate result was that the Wolverhampton Chapel case, which had been lingering on, was now decided against the Unitarians. Lord Eldon, in giving judgement, laid it down that "a Trust for the worship of God pure and simple, is a Trust for maintaining and propagating the Established Religion of the country". The curious result of this judgement was that the Wolverhampton Chapel and endowments, instead of being handed over to Protestant Dissenters who had initiated the lawsuit, were handed over to the Church of England.

The effect of these two judgements was profoundly disconcerting to Unitarians. They felt that none of their old chapels and endowments were safe, and they realized that if any of them were attacked they must be prepared to see them handed over either to the Church of England or to orthodox Dissent. It was undoubtedly very hard. These Chapels and these Trusts had gradually passed into the hands of Unitarians. There had been no definite break in the past. The change of thought had been gradual, often imperceptible, from year to year. There had been no dishonesty, no insincerity. The Chapel Trust specified in most cases that this chapel "was for the worship of Almighty God". If the congregation became Unitarian, it had no sense of disloyalty to the past, and no feeling that it was perverting the chapel from the use for which it had been intended. Whether the founders wished to make the way easy for theological development or not, it was quite clear that the Free Trust permitted theological development, and that if the only specified purpose of a chapel was for the worship

of Almighty God, a congregation which had become Unitarian had a right to remain in possession of it.

The peril was imminent. "I know", said the Lord Chancellor in 1844 "that two or three hundred suits are already talked of as likely to be initiated for the purpose of ousting the present possessors." It might easily have happened that most of the chapels in which Unitarian Congregations then worshipped might have been taken from them and handed over to orthodox Dissenters. What effect this would have had on Unitarianism it is impossible to say. It would not have destroyed it. Persecution, like defeat in war, when not too overwhelming, often makes for renewed life. It is a testimony to the growing tolerance of the nation, and also to the recognized integrity and value of Unitarians, that the "Dissenters' Chapel Act" was carried by a large majority in 1844. It was warmly supported, not only by Macaulay, Monckton Milnes, and Lord John Russell, but by Mr. Gladstone and Sir Robert Peel.

This Act "secured Unitarians in their possession of Trusts containing no doctrinal provision, when they could prove the undisputed usage of twenty-five years in favour of the opinions they held and taught". Mr. Gladstone's speech in defence of the Act was especially remarkable. "Here", he said, "were certain persons who founded their Chapels entertaining one Creed, and the present possessors of these Chapels professing another Creed. I admit this sounds startling. But if you take the pains to follow the course of events from year to year, it is impossible to say that *at any given period* the transition from one doctrine to another was made. It was a gradual and imperceptible transition. The parties who effected it made a different use of the principle of inquiry by private judgement than those who had

preceded them, but *they acted on a principle fundamentally the same.*" The idea of Christianity as a shifting, changing, and advancing subject which he found in Baxter and others, was the exact opposite of his own, but he generously recognized its validity in Presbyterian Nonconformity. He quoted from Cotton Mather his report of John Robinson's words to the first settlers in New England in 1620. "I beseech you to remember that it is an article of your Church covenant that you will be ready to receive whatever truth shall be made known unto you from the written word of God."

There was a curious confusion in the Bill as first drawn. It was supported by the argument that a Free Trust involved the possibility of doctrinal changes, and that if Congregations changed in the course of time from Trinitarianism to Unitarianism, there was no breach of trust. But this argument, rightly interpreted, ought to apply to the future as well as to the past. It involved the possibility of further change. It ought to mean that these Congregations might again become Trinitarians if at any time they so decided, and that, within the limits of some form of worship of God, they still remained entirely free to change their doctrine.

But the Bill, as originally drafted, declared "that where no particular religious doctrines were enforced by the Trust Deeds, the usage of so many years (the number was left to be fixed by Parliament) should be taken as conclusive evidence of the doctrines for the promotion of which the meeting houses were founded". If this clause had remained, it would have fixed these Free Trust Chapels for all future time as definitely Unitarian. The usage of the last twenty-five years was to be regarded as the form of doctrine "for the promotion of which the meeting houses were founded". This would have

been an outrageous perversion of the intention of the founders. They may, or they may not, have clearly envisaged the possibility of some doctrinal changes, but no one can suppose that they desired or intended that their Chapels should become Unitarian. To have carried this clause would have been, not only an injustice to the past, but an injustice to the future. As the *Christian Teacher* pointed out, "It would have created a creed of usage in default of a creed of trust". It would have stopped any further possibility of development. These Free Trust Presbyterian Chapels would have become Close Trust Unitarian Chapels. Martineau, then a young man, was one of those who protested strongly against this clause. The difficulty was raised in Committee by Mr. J. Stuart Wortley and Mr. Cardwell, and was removed on the report stage by amendments introduced by the Solicitor-General to secure "the more ample recognition of the power of such Dissenting Congregations as had no tests or creeds to change their opinions as they saw fit in the lapse of time". The final division took place on July 15, 1844, and the Bill was carried by a majority of 161.

The result was to legalize the claims of Unitarian Congregations to Presbyterian Open Trusts, and at the same time to keep those Trusts still open, making it possible for those Unitarian Congregations to change their opinions in the future as they had changed them in the past. It would indeed have been a disgrace to Unitarians if Chapels whose members had become Unitarian through the possession of Free Trusts founded by orthodox ancestors had been finally fixed and stereotyped as Unitarian. The clause as originally drawn was the work of legal experts who were ignorant of the fundamental question, and is a good example of the

confusion and illogicality often found in Bills drafted by legal experts. It is to the honour of Unitarians that they protested urgently against their Chapels being permanently labelled as Unitarian. They themselves were Unitarians, and desired the use of their Chapels for worship in accordance with their own opinions, but they were determined to leave those Chapels as free as they had received them. The freedom they claimed for themselves, and which they had received from their ancestors, they desired to hand on unchanged to the future.

From this time Unitarianism entered on a new phase of existence. It was no longer fighting for its life against the State, no longer in danger of legal deprivation. There were many conflicts in front of it, many difficulties, but they were more internal than external, more concerned with doctrinal divergencies within, and with differences of ecclesiastical organization than with opposition from without.

CHAPTER XIII

CHANGE OF INTELLECTUAL AND CRITICAL POINT OF VIEW

IT cannot be too strongly emphasized that Unitarianism was, at the end of the eighteenth century and far into the nineteenth century, based entirely on the Bible. There was an underlying reverence for reason, a feeling that the Bible must be interpreted rationally, and a faith that the Bible must be capable of rational exposition because it came from God, and God was rational. Just as in earlier times the Deists had maintained that the universe is rational because it is the creation of supreme Reason, so the early Unitarians maintained that the Bible was rational because it was given to men by God, and was the word of God. Of course, both in the case of the universe and of the Bible, there may occur inexplicable difficulties. Some facts in the universe may seem evil, some statements in the Bible may be obscure, but the man who accepts the universe as the creation of God will be quite sure that these evil things might be reconciled with his faith in God, and the man who accepts the Bible will be quite sure that these obscurities can be explained.

However much Unitarians differed from the orthodox in their interpretation of the Bible, they were at one with them in accepting the Bible as an authority for their religion. Two very noteworthy utterances may be taken as representations of Unitarianism in this respect in the early nineteenth century.

The Principal of Manchester College, York, in 1823, the Rev. Charles Wellbeloved, in his controversy with Archdeacon Wrangham, declared, "I adopt the common language of Unitarians when I say, convince us that any tenet is authorized by the Bible, from that moment we receive it. Prove any doctrine to be a doctrine of Christ emanating from that wisdom which is from above, and we take it for our own, and no power on earth shall wrest it from us".

And the Rev. J. J. Tayler, at his ordination in the Protestant Dissenting Chapel, Moseley Street, Manchester, in 1821, said, "The Christian minister must dismiss from his mind all bigoted attachments to human formularies of faith, and make the Scriptures alone, as containing the revealed will of God, the subject of his constant study and meditation. Whatever the Scriptures teach as indubitably the word of God, it is his bounden duty to recommend and enforce".

Very much to the same effect was the confession of faith spoken by Martineau in 1828, at his induction to his first church at Dublin. "Every Minister of Religion is the servant of Revelation, appointed to expound its doctrines, to enforce its precepts, and to proclaim its sanctions." The view he expresses about Jesus Christ must be quoted at some length, because it represents the general position of Unitarians at that time.

"Him I acknowledge as the mediator between God and man, who was appointed to produce by his life, and yet more peculiarly by his death, an unprecedented change in the spiritual condition of mankind, and to open a new and living way of salvation. . . . I receive and reverence him, not merely for that sinless excellence which made him a perfect pattern to our race: but as the commissioned delegate of Heaven on whom the

Spirit was poured without measure . . . in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead, bodily. As authorities for our duties, as fountains of consoling and elevating truth, Jesus and the Father are one; and in all subjects of religious faith and obedience, not to honour him as we honour the Father is to violate our allegiance to him as the great Captain of our salvation. When Jesus commands, I would listen as to a voice from Heaven: when he instructs, I would treasure up his teachings as the words of everlasting truth: when he promises, I would trust to his assurances as to an oracle of destiny." The primary duties of the Christian minister were "to awake devotion to God, obedient faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and practical expectation of eternity". Among his secondary duties were the free study and explanation of God's word. In a deep sense these duties remained the same for him throughout his life: they express the underlying faith and aim of James Martineau and leading Unitarians down to the present day.

On the other hand, in relation to the authority of the Bible and the person of Jesus, Martineau, and modern Unitarians, have changed greatly from the doctrinal position stated above.

The old Unitarian position was, from certain points of view, a strong one. It recommended itself to men of intelligence and character. In the first place, it set them free from Creeds and appealed to their self-respect. It bade them regard themselves as free men, capable of finding, and responsible for finding, the truth for themselves. Luther and the early Protestants never dared to carry the principle of freedom so far. For them there was always a Creed, at which the man who was commanded to search the Scriptures, was definitely expected to arrive.

In the second place there is undoubtedly a great deal of Unitarian doctrine in the Bible, in the sense that a large part of its teaching comes from God the Father Almighty, who stands alone as the object of worship and prayer and the source of life and good. It may be said that the whole of the Old Testament is Unitarian in that sense. A very large part of the New Testament also is Unitarian in the same sense. Jesus Christ undoubtedly holds a unique place in religion according to the New Testament. He is much more than one of the Prophets or John the Baptist, but it does not follow that he is the second Person in the Trinity. If he is to be regarded as a man, he must be regarded as a very specially endowed and entirely unique man. Indeed, what Martineau says about him in the quotation given above, seems to come nearest to a correct interpretation of Scripture.

If the whole Bible were placed in the hands of a very intelligent visitor from another world, if he knew nothing whatever about Christian history or Christian doctrine, if he were simply told that these books were the word of God, and if he were asked not to criticize but to interpret them, it might be argued that the result, so far as the New Testament is concerned, would be very much the views of Christ as expressed by Martineau. If he were a man who wanted religious certainty and moral guidance above all, the more contented he would be with a book which claimed to be the very word of God. It is an immense comfort to have an ultimate source of authority definitely fixed, especially when it is so admirable, so moving, so nobly ethical, so spiritually uplifting, as the Bible is in many parts.

On the other hand, if the intelligent visitor were inclined to be critical and concerned himself with con-

sistency, he would certainly find himself troubled when he tried to get a clear, definite doctrine of God and Christ and human nature out of the Bible as a whole. He would have felt this all the more when he was told, not merely that the Bible was the word of God, but that it was the word of the Father whom Jesus taught men to worship. If we are to retain belief in the whole Bible, it must be by slurring over and explaining away inconsistencies, and by a conscious or unconscious criticism which refuses to accept passages which are out of harmony with the highest faith in God.

It may be said that there was a great deal of unconscious rejection of the full authority of the Bible before its authority was consciously challenged. Without realizing it fully, Unitarians had been making reason and conscience—their sense of what was rational and their sense of what was right—ultimate standards by which the Bible was to be judged, long before they understood what they were doing. They still believed that they believed in the Bible as a final authority when they were denying doctrines to be found in it.

Probably Dr. Channing (1780–1842), the great American preacher and essayist, was the most effective and potent force making for a more self-conscious and fundamental criticism of the Bible. This will sound to many a paradoxical statement. Channing was not a great critic nor a great theologian. He was a great moral and spiritual force. He had, perhaps, more influence as a preacher than any other Unitarian in our history. His fundamental faith was the goodness of human nature, and this compelled him to attack orthodox views of the Fall and the Atonement and eternal punishment. He was not a controversialist or a critic by nature or

training. And yet, the famous Baltimore sermon, preached by Channing in 1819, was what might be described as an aggressive defence of Unitarianism against orthodoxy. It is said to have been the most widely read and influential sermon ever preached in America.

Channing's sermon is an instance of the power a tolerant religious-minded man, who desires peace, can exert when, under the influence of moral passion, he engages in controversy. His sermon was mainly against Calvinistic orthodoxy and on behalf of a more spiritual view of God and human nature. It was based, of course, on the Bible, but it was an interpretation of the Bible under the influence of a faith in reason and righteousness which undermined the ultimate authority of the Bible. Channing's non-controversial sermons were, many of them, of much higher value than the few in which he defended Unitarianism against Orthodoxy. They were read and admired by men of differing creeds in England as well as in America. Martineau said of them, "They brought a new language: they burst into a forgotten chamber of the soul: they recalled natural faiths which had been explained away, and boldly appealed to feelings which had been struck down: they touched the springs of a sleeping enthusiasm, and carried us forward from the outer temple of devout service to the inner shrine of self-denying Duty". As Dr. Carpenter says in his life of Martineau, "Channing's sense of moral beauty prepared Martineau to receive the further doctrine of human nature as the seat of heavenly powers where conscience sat enthroned, at once a Revelation and a Type of God". "From Channing he learnt that moral perfection is the essence of God and the supreme end of man." This set up a higher standard of truth than the Bible. Channing dwelt continually on the ethical

and religious teaching of Jesus and on the example of his life and death. The divine in Jesus was to him a revelation of the divine in man. Jesus was to him, not only a revelation of God *to* man, but a revelation of God *in* man. The appeal of Channing was to the religious nature of man. The truth of the Gospel of Christ depended on its being realized as true.

This was the very reverse of Priestley's position, who argued that the Christian Revelation was true because it was guaranteed by prophecy, by miracles, and, above all, by the Resurrection. This position made the recorded statements in the New Testament the ultimate proof of the value of Christianity. These recorded statements, and the arguments founded upon them by St. Paul and St. John, were interpreted by Priestley and his Unitarian successors in a different sense from the orthodox interpretation, but for both parties the Revelation was proved by prophecy and miracle. Channing did not concern himself with prophecy and miracle. He did not dispute them: on the whole he appears to have accepted them. They were, however, to him, matters of comparative indifference, and when this happens they are already half disbelieved. If the virgin birth and the stilling of the sea and the raising of Lazarus are true, then those who regard them as infinitely significant are right. To lay the chief stress on the moral and religious teaching of Jesus, and the beauty and appeal of his life, as Channing did, is to treat the miraculous as unimportant, and to treat the miraculous as unimportant is to be treading a path which leads to disbelief in the miraculous.

It is important to realize that it was on these moral and spiritual grounds that miracles and the ultimate authority of Scripture became doubtful to Unitarians.

In the eighteenth century Hume and other sceptics had disbelieved the miracles. Their disbelief was based entirely on rational grounds. It was not out of reverence for the moral and religious teaching of Jesus that they disbelieved in the miracles. In abolishing the miracles and the infallibility of the Bible they thought they had abolished Christianity, and many of them rejoiced in the fact. It is of great importance for those who wish to understand Unitarianism to realize that criticism of the Bible and disbelief in the miracles arose amongst them as the result of a deeper religious faith, and not merely a keener historical inquiry. Older Unitarians, no doubt, had laid great stress on the teaching of Jesus. Moral homilies were indeed the mark of much preaching, both orthodox and unorthodox, at the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century. But behind the moral teaching, giving it weight and significance, were the miracles and the authority of the Bible. It might be claimed that Channing was the first, or at any rate the greatest, of those Unitarians whose teaching, while derived from the Bible and dependent on the Bible, yet appealed to an inward light and an inward experience which was independent of the Bible. God's love, man's natural goodness, Christ's Gospel, did not depend for Channing on the virgin birth or the Resurrection or on St. Paul's Epistles. These truths stood up clear and beautiful by themselves. They are true because the best that is in us knows them to be true. They are true because we respond to them, because they reveal us to ourselves, because they give meaning and power to life. It was as a result of that heart-searching and inspiring appeal, because of that deeper, more spiritual faith in God and man, that the miracles and the authority of the Bible

were challenged by Unitarians. No doubt German criticism had something to do with it too: no doubt the tendency, strongly marked among Unitarians, towards free inquiry had something to do with it. But on the whole, it can be claimed that the development from a purely Biblical Unitarianism to a religious faith founded upon what was then described as Reason and Conscience, and what we should describe as experience and insight, was the result of such preaching as that of Dr. Channing.[1] Channing's description of the difference between the Unitarians and the orthodox in his time is expressed by him in the following words: "The fundamental question which divides us into Orthodox and Liberal is this: 'How far is Reason to be used in explaining Revelation?' The Liberal Christian not only differs from his orthodox brother in particular points, but differs in his mode of explaining that Book which they both acknowledge to be the Umpire. The progressive influence of Christianity depends mainly on the fact that it is a rational religion: by which I mean not that it is such a system as reason could discover without revelation, and still less that it is a cold and lifeless scheme of philosophical doctrines, but that it is a religion which agrees with itself, with our moral nature, with our experience and observation, with the order of the Universe, and with the manifest attributes of God" (*Life of Channing*, i. 424). This distinction goes deep, and the Liberal may find, if he accepts the principle of Channing, that the Bible itself can no longer remain the ultimate umpire of his faith.

[1] "Consider the discoveries which Jesus Christ has made of the glory of human nature. His gospel may be said to be a revelation of man to himself. It calls us home to our own hearts and there discloses to us capacities which should awaken the profoundest gratitude and admiration" (*Life of Channing*, ii, p. 47).

Channing realized clearly the serious differences between orthodoxy and Liberal Christianity, but this realization was united always in him with a sympathy and love which reverenced sincere religion in every form of Christian thought. "Think no man the better", he said in memorable words, "for belonging to your denomination, and no man the worse for belonging to another." It should also be noted that while Channing considered Unitarianism in its doctrinal sense of worship of the one God and denial of the Trinity as an advance towards an unobscured view of the Christian Religion, the thought of resting in a Unitarian Creed, or of confining his sympathies to a Unitarian Denomination never for a moment shadowed his mind. He regarded himself as "belonging not to a sect, but to the Community of free minds, of lovers of truth, of followers of Christ in earth and in heaven" (*Life of Channing*, ii, 392).

CHAPTER XIV

DR. MARTINEAU

THE man who stands out above all others in the history of nineteenth-century Unitarianism as having influenced its development and deepened its religious life is James Martineau, 1805–1900. He is the best representative of modern Unitarianism in that his free criticism of the Bible was united with an intense reverence for Jesus and a profound faith in God. His sermons are classics in their beauty of expression and in their depth of spiritual experience. They interpret the life and teaching of Jesus in terms of modern thought and modern needs. They appeal to the best in human nature, and they are filled with a sense of the infinite value of life and the goodness of God. On the other hand, this confident religious faith was united with a complete repudiation of the Bible as an ultimate authority.

There were many who were criticizing the Bible, especially in Germany, from the point of view of historians and students of anthropology, without much interest in the fundamental truths of religion, and there were others who were mainly concerned with the truths of religion without troubling themselves about Biblical criticism. Modern Unitarianism at its best is fearlessly critical and profoundly religious. It is represented most completely by Martineau. As a young man he had been a disciple of Priestley, believing in the doctrine of Necessity and in a divine revelation through Christ which was guaranteed through prophecy and miracle.

The first sign of development is seen in his early work *The Rationale of Religion, or, The Question stated of Reason, the Bible, and the Church*, published in 1836. In these lectures he affirmed that "no seeming inspiration can establish anything contrary to reason: that the last appeal in all researches into religious truth must be to the judgements of the human mind: that against these judgements Scripture cannot have any authority, for upon its authority they themselves decide". "The Unitarians", he observed, "have repeatedly said if we could find the doctrines of the Trinity and the Atonement and everlasting torment in the Scriptures, we should believe them: we reject them, not because we deem them unreasonable, but because we perceive them to be unscriptural. For my own part I confess myself unable to adopt that language." The expression of the new point of view in these lectures is tentative, almost apologetic and carefully guarded. He did not deny the miracles at this time, and was prepared even to refuse the Christian name tc those who did deny them. And yet, he was heralding a change as fundamental as that of Luther when he appealed from the Church to the Bible.

No one can understand modern Unitarianism who does not realize this change of authority from the Bible to conscience and reason. No one can understand modern Unitarianism who does not also realize that this change of authority did not involve, with Martineau, any breach with the past. It was a reinterpretation of orthodoxy which resulted from the change, not a repudiation of the whole teaching of orthodoxy. It was not destruction: it was reconstruction. It was the aim to establish on a firmer foundation what was the essential truth of orthodoxy.

It has often been pointed out that Martineau refers

to great orthodox classics, such as the writings of Augustine, Thomas à Kempis, Jeremy Taylor, and William Law, with a love and gratitude which seems to imply that he owed much more to them than to Unitarian books of devotion and religious thought. No doubt he did, but it does not follow, as is sometimes suggested, that he was less of a Unitarian on that account. It might be said that he proved himself more of a Unitarian on that account. It is a fundamental misunderstanding of Unitarianism to imagine it essentially critical. Its criticism is based on faith in God and man. It claims that it has a higher Authority. It is critical in the sense that it dethrones Church and Bible from their seat of authority. However long established may be a tradition of the Church, however clearly proved may be the meaning of a Biblical text, it is unconvinced of their truth unless they can be proved before the bar of a higher authority, the authority of rational thought and spiritual experience. It denies orthodox doctrines of the Atonement, not because they are un-Biblical, but because they are immoral. It denies the Deity of Christ, not because there is no trace of such a doctrine in the New Testament, but because even if there is, it does not accept statements of St. Paul or St. John as overruling reason.

This attitude towards the Bible brought those who adopted it out of their thraldom to the letter, and gave them far more power of appreciation and reverence for the best that was in it. They tried no longer to twist words and sentences to mean what they wanted them to mean. Their theology was freed from dependence on textual criticism.

Unitarianism then, was critical in the sense of not merely examining the meaning of the Bible by the light

of reason and conscience, but also in the sense of inquiring into the origin and authorship and value of its contents with the freedom of trained, critical historians. But at the same time, it was fundamentally religious in that the higher authority to which it appealed seemed to it to be more worthy of reverence and more capable of guiding men in the way of life. Martineau's philosophical works were, it might be said, an answer to the challenge of orthodoxy and early Unitarianism. "You have shattered the authority of the Bible, you have taken away the grounds of religious faith. Now show us, if you can, what reasons for religion and morality are left, when Church and Bible are gone."

Martineau's answer to that challenge is given in his *Study of Religion* and his *Ethics*. No one can doubt the profound religious depth and conviction of these books. It is a religion and morality drawn not from the Scripture, but from reason and conscience. It is free philosophical thinking, which results in a belief in the personality of God, the divine constraint of duty, and the immortality of the soul. There are many philosophers in all ages who, working independently of the Bible, have arrived at a more or less definite religious conception of the world and human life. There is none who has presented the religious point of view with greater beauty, conviction, and moving cogency.

No one could claim that Martineau's philosophy was final. Philosophy, like theology, is an endless quest, an endless attempt to express the incomprehensible, and to explain the Infinite and Eternal. But it was the answer of Unitarianism to the question, "What can you make of man and God, and the meaning and purpose of life, apart from the Bible? How far will human reason and conscience take you by themselves?"

But there is another element in Unitarianism as interpreted by Martineau in addition to criticism and philosophy. After repudiating Church authority and Creeds and the Bible as ultimate, after establishing a religion without them, it was the recognition that the religion of the Spirit is, after all, only a reinterpretation of what the Bible and the Creeds and the Churches really mean. It was not Modernism in the sense of a Modernism which is prepared to repeat Creeds which are not literally believed, and to give its own meaning to them. Nothing is more strongly marked throughout Unitarianism than their distrust of Creeds and their demand for veracity. Martineau was incapable of the Modernist methods. He could not repeat a Creed in which he did not thoroughly believe. He would not have signed a Creed even if he had believed in it.

But he had a great respect for Historic Religion, a devoted reverence for the Bible, and a deep sense of underlying truth permeating all forms of Christian thought and practice. There was in him a clear and decisive rejection of orthodoxy as formulated in Creeds, united with a penetrating sympathy towards the sincerely orthodox, and even with a reverent attitude of mind towards their beliefs. At the conclusion of *The Seat of Authority* there are some bold, sad words which represent the best modern Unitarianism on its negative side. "The conclusion is forced upon me, on which I cannot dwell without pain, viz. that Christianity as defined or understood in all the Churches which formulate it, has been mainly evolved from what is transient and perishable in its sources, from what is unhistorical in its traditions, mythological in its preconceptions, and misapprehended in the oracles of its prophets. From the fable of Eden to the imagination of the last trumpet, the

whole story of the Divine order of the world is dislocated and deformed. The blight of birth-sin with its involuntary perdition: the scheme of expiatory redemption with its vicarious salvation, the incarnation with its low postulates of the relation between God and man and its unworkable doctrine of two natures in one person, the official transmission of grace through material elements in the keeping of a consecrated corporation: the second coming of Christ to summon the dead and part the sheep from the goats at the general judgement: all are the growth of mythical literature, a Messianic dream, a Pharisaic theology, a sacramental superstition, a popular apotheosis." This is a far more uncompromising and complete break with orthodoxy than anything to be found in the older Biblical Unitarianism.

But this sweeping rejection of orthodoxy does not involve, for Martineau, the repudiation of historic religion and reliance only on individual thought and vision. "The excessive claims of orthodoxy", he says, thinking perhaps of Emerson, "have provoked into activity the opposite disposition, to repudiate as obsolete our special heritage from the past; to begin afresh and live to-day as if it were alone in time: to breathe the morning air as if it were new born, instead of sweeping down the Alpine valleys and across the purifying seas of another zone. We are asked to set aside the divinest influences transmitted to us by history, as impertinent obtrusions between the soul and God, and retire wholly within for private audience with God." Here we have the repudiation of mere individualistic religion, which is a common reaction when the orthodox interpretation of the Bible is rejected.

It is, of course, immensely important, even supremely important, for a man to feel the immediate presence of

God, for him to have communion with the living God, and to find strength and help in relation with a divine encompassing mystery in which time and history play no part. In vague and wavering outlines that is what a good deal of modern religion amounts to. It is vague mysticism. It finds its external stimulus in Poetry, in Nature, in Art, or in Philosophy. It finds its internal evidence of the divine through love and sorrow. This kind of vague mysticism is prevailingly outside the Churches. It has no sense of the historic value of Christianity. Certain phrases in the Psalms or certain sayings of Jesus may be enjoyed or reverenced, but there is no desire for corporate fellowship, no feeling after a reformed Church in which public worship and prayer will be as vital as they have been to Roman Catholics and Puritans.

Unitarianism, as represented by Martineau, is a historic religion, a religion of reverence for the past as well as reverence for the future; it is not a new, individualistic way of thought and feeling. It finds expression, not only in private prayer and public righteousness, but in public worship and private inquiry. It is a difficult combination, and the difficulty probably accounts to a considerable extent for the numerical weakness of Unitarians as a corporate body.

It is very easy to accept the negative and historical side of Unitarianism. The bold condemnation of orthodox doctrines and the whole scheme of orthodoxy would be accepted by ever-increasing multitudes of thinking and unthinking men and women. It is humiliating to realize on what slight grounds of thought and understanding the whole august system of orthodoxy is rejected by myriads of people to-day. Renan, in his autobiography, describes his astonishment and pain when, after long

and deep research into Biblical history, he had reluctantly felt himself obliged to give up the creeds of orthodoxy, and then finds that his cousin, who had hardly read or thought at all upon the subject, had reached, without effort or knowledge, to exactly the same result. "There are in reality few people", he says, "who have a right not to believe in Christianity. When one has been at great pains to learn the truth, it is irritating to have to allow that the frivolous, who could never be induced to read a line of Augustine or Aquinas, are true sages. It is hard to think that Gavroche and my Voltairean cousin attain without an effort the Alpine heights of philosophy."

This rejection of orthodox claims about the Bible and the Church is very easy to-day. Some of these people stay in their own Churches, consoling themselves with the reflection, that as religion is concerned with the incomprehensible and inexpressible, the orthodox forms of expression are probably no worse than any other. Friendships, associations, love of tradition, piety, keep them for a time where they were, but the bond is loose, and ever loosening, when the fundamental principles of orthodoxy are disbelieved.

A few of those who have rejected Biblical authority join the Unitarians, and often bring with them a keen interest and a pathetic hope. Their hopes must not be treated as unrealizable, but under present conditions they are often unrealized. The great majority of those who give up orthodoxy leave the Churches altogether and drift away into vague indifferentism or mild individualistic religiosity. Some of them join Churches which are an amalgam of Christian and non-Christian thought, like Theosophy. Some of them join Churches which try to unite religion with science, like

the Christian Science Church. All of them have left the stream of Christian History, and are no longer in relation with the past.

There is a very significant expression of Martineau's own views in *A Letter to a Minister in Doubt*, written in 1842:—

"As to the miracles, though I feel no difficulty in holding to them still, with certain special exceptions, yet not one of them which rest for their evidence merely on the attestation of the three first Gospels or the Book of Acts can be considered secure enough to afford a foundation for anything. But all this moves me not at all: and so little help should I derive from the whole system of external proof, were it ever so sound, in discerning the inspiration of Christ, that I look upon the miracle controversy as of very trivial moment. Yet, though I make this estimate of the Anti-supernaturalist controversy, I do not hesitate to say that the conjunction of something preternatural is essential to devout faith: and that without miracle there is no religion.

"For my own part I am persuaded that there is only one way in which religion can enter a human heart, viz. by the agency of a higher soul over a lower, an agency natural, indefinable, irresistible. . . . It is in the material and conscious subordination of spirit to spirit, on the spontaneous assumption by us all of our rank in the great community of souls, that I place the essence and origin of all religion.

"All religions are traditional and historical, not scientific and individual: gifts from the past, not inventions of the present. And each bears the impress of some great soul from which it appears as a communicated influence. The first origination of religious dis-

cernment is what I understand by inspiration: its communication to other minds (not by argument, but by their instinctive response to it as what *they also discern* now that it is put before them) is what I understand by *Revelation*.

"Whoever then thinks that he can make out that Christ and his religion are an intelligible *effect* of previous conditions, whoever can speak of them as products of the age and circumstances, appears to be destitute of the mode of feeling which constitutes discipleship. Whoever sees in Christ, on the other hand, a pure, spontaneous, irresolvable cause of the divinest truth and guidance we possess, is, be his theology what it may, his genuine follower.

"To be disciples of Christ we must recognize something supernatural about him, in the sense before expounded. We do not discard miracles as things that could not be true, but view them rather as things that might have been true, though they fail to find a sufficient historical basis. We regard them, if not as realities themselves, at least as the symbols of a reality quite as great, signs of the wonderfulness there was in Christ, of the subduing majesty and power of his spirit of which no adequate impression could otherwise be given than by exhibiting material nature and mortal suffering crouching and submissive at his feet."

These words, on the whole, represent Martineau's conception of Christianity throughout his life. He was much more definite in his rejection of miracles in later days: he would probably have recognized that inspiration, i.e. direct personal knowledge of God, was more widely spread than he seems to admit here. But while his criticisms of the Gospels became ever more daring, the life and teaching of Jesus remained to him always

the supreme miracle in History. In the personality of Jesus he saw revealed the personality of God: in the character of Jesus he saw revealed the highest possibilities of man: in the teaching of Jesus he saw revealed the Way of Life.

His own aim as a preacher is well described in a letter to the Rev. G. Crabbe, 1845. "To draw forth the permanent elements of Christianity from the Scriptures: to impart to men such a consciousness of the adaptation of these to our nature that all doubt of their sufficiency shall become impossible: to make no disguise about the questionable and temporary character of all the rest, to attack any inordinate claims set up for it, when requisite—but, for the most part, to let these claims die out by forming men's spiritual and moral taste on better models, and by the constant pressure of higher ideals: this appears to me to be the true course for those who love Christianity for what it *is*, more than they dislike its counterfeits for what they are *not*."

"Bigots of all classes will refuse a hearing to those who, with or without a name, boldly challenge their favourite opinions. All other men—such at least is my cheering faith—are more easily *drawn* to noble and true ideals than *driven* from mean and false ones."

Martineau became the most honoured leader and most representative thinker among Unitarians, but he was for a long time regarded with suspicion as a dangerous innovator by many in his own communion. He was setting up, what seemed to them, a nebulous authority in the place of the Bible. To himself he did not seem an innovator: he was carrying to a logical conclusion what was implicit in the Unitarian view of the Bible which they had been afraid of acknowledging.

He says in his letter to the Rev. G. Crabbe, "That

the Unitarians in general *do* differ from other Churches on this point, that they see a much larger *human* element in the sacred writings: that they are more prepared to acknowledge the manifest discrepancies in the historical portion and inconclusive reasonings in the doctrinal: that practically, the submission to Scripture is *conditional* on its teaching no nonsense, I am fully persuaded. And, believing this to be their state of mind —often ill defined to themselves—I cannot but disapprove, as insincere, their profession of agreement with the orthodox on everything except Interpretation, their appeal to the Scriptures under the misleading name of 'The Word of God': their affected horror at every one who plainly speaks about the Bible the truth which they themselves, if they dare to confess it, privately hold. To this moral untruthfulness and the unreality it gives to their position, much more than to other errors and unsoundness of interpretation, do I attribute the small amount of their success as a religious sect".

There is just a touch of controversial bitterness in this. Martineau was being continually attacked at this time by Unitarians, and his judgement of their position was inevitably affected by it. The Biblical Unitarians were not as a body "morally untruthful". They believed that they believed in the Bible as the ultimate authority, long after they had made its authority subservient to Reason. Their position was illogical, but they had not realized it was illogical. Their hypothesis was that the Bible was capable of being rationally interpreted, and that when it was rationally interpreted its teaching would be found to be entirely in harmony with right reason and the moral and spiritual needs of man. What they cared for supremely was right reason and the moral and spiritual needs of man, but

revering the Bible as they did, they expected, desired, and believed that it must, when rightly interpreted, turn out to be in accordance with what reason and conscience could approve and accept. It was this comfortable and sometimes complacent belief that Martineau challenged. He maintained that the older Unitarianism was a compromise between two positions, both of which were tenable, while the compromise between them was untenable.

On the one hand it was possible, with orthodoxy, to hold to the supreme authority of Scripture, and to regard Reason and Conscience as instruments for our understanding of it and our response to it. In that case we must sometimes have to accept what is beyond our reason and even repellent to our moral sense. We shall, of course, do our best to understand the Bible and to feel its inward greatness, but in the last resort, when reason is helpless to explain and morality is helpless to approve, we shall bow down in reverence before an authority which is above and beyond them in childlike submission to its august majesty. On the other hand, if we really believe whole-heartedly in Reason and Conscience and make their claims paramount, we must reject much in the Bible as unreasonable and unmoral. That is what the Unitarians had been doing, so Martineau urged, without knowing that they were doing it. They had been giving forced, unnatural interpretations of various sayings and events. Their faith in the Bible as Unitarian in every part of it, and as in accordance with the essential teaching of Jesus, was unjustifiable. We must definitely choose between the Bible on the one hand and Reason and Conscience on the other, as the ultimate authority. Under the influence of German criticism and modern views of History which

were being developed in the mid-Victorian period, the authority of the Bible was breaking down. This criticism was often purely negative and destructive, and seemed to leave the Bible with little religious significance. The importance of Martineau for Unitarianism was that while he was fearless in his criticism of the Bible, he regarded it still as of supreme value as a revelation of God to man. He did not believe that it could, in every part, be made harmonious with Reason and Conscience, but he believed that the best in it, and especially the life and teaching of Jesus, was of unique significance and worth.

Unitarianism, largely under the influence of Martineau, was no longer a religion dependent upon Biblical authority. It was a religion of the free Spirit controlled by Reason and Conscience. It held fast to the great affirmations of Christianity. It believed in God and the soul. It regarded the teachings of Jesus as the Way of Life, and the life of Jesus as the highest ideal of manhood. It looked on orthodox doctrines not so much as perversions or corruptions of the truth as adumbrations of the truth. It was no longer mainly concerned with proving that the Bible had been misinterpreted by orthodoxy. It was concerned with proving that the fundamental doctrines of Christianity were true. Martineau, in a letter to the Rev. G. T. Porter in 1840, says, "For myself, the more I study the beliefs of those from whom I differ, not in the spirit of controversy but of sympathy, the more I endeavour to recognize the point of view and feeling of those who hold them, the more do I see of essential sanctifying heart-truth in them, though the form into which they are thrown is one to which neither my reason nor my interpretation of Scripture can yield assent. I rejoice with thanksgiving

that they can do for others what they cannot do for me. With this conception that all Christian faiths are but symbols of unapproachable realities, I do not expect that there will be any ultimate and universal agreement in one form of doctrine". In an address to Unitarians in 1838 he says, "We should turn our attention not to orthodoxy, which has a faith and is satisfied with it, but to indifference and unbelief and sin, which have it not and are satisfied without it. On these we should make aggression in the power of our positive religion, bearing down upon them with the persuasion of the divine Paternity and Human Brotherhood, under the sense of the sanctity of duty and the grandeur of immortality. We should deal with them with singleness of aim as if left alone in God's world to cure them, as if unconscious of the presence of other sects".

The result of this was to make Unitarianism a much more positive and catholic faith, and to give it a much deeper sympathy with all forms of Christianity. It was not more vague or uncertain of its own opinions, but it was much more deeply concerned with the truths which are held in common by all Christian Churches, than with their differences. This change of emphasis helps to explain the Unitarian view of a Free Church.

CHAPTER XV

FREEDOM IN RELIGION

ONE of the main difficulties in understanding Unitarianism, not only for the orthodox, but for Unitarians themselves, is the principle of Freedom and the dislike of Sectarianism which has characterized, especially in recent times, many of their leading thinkers and teachers.

It is desirable to realize the different meanings which may be attached to a Free Church. A Free Church may simply mean a Church which is exempt from State control. In that sense all Nonconformist Churches are free. They can govern themselves according to their own desires. They can impose what Creeds they choose as a condition of membership. They can appoint and dismiss their ministers. This kind of Free Church may be either Congregational or Presbyterian or Wesleyan. It may be composed of Churches which are each of them self-governing communities, or it may be composed of Churches which agree to manage their affairs by a Central Board on which all the Congregations are in some way represented. A Presbyterian Church or Wesleyan Church, where the individual congregation is largely controlled by the Presbytery or by the Wesleyan Assembly, may be a Free Church in this sense. The Anglican Church and the Presbyterian Church of Scotland are not free, because they are State Churches, but all which are democratically managed by themselves are Free Churches in this sense.

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But there is a second and further meaning which may be conveyed by the term Free Church. It may mean a Church which has what is called an Open Trust. An Open Trust, in its simplest form, is a Trust which simply states that "this Chapel is built for the Worship of Almighty God". All kinds of additions are found in such so-called Open Trusts. It may be, as in the case of Bank Street, Bolton, according to the certificates issued in 1696, "A Meeting House newly erected for the worship of Almighty God by His Majesty's loyal Protestant subjects, the Dissenters of Bolton and the adjacent parts, commonly called Presbyterians". In many cases there were references to its being built for the use of Protestant Dissenters, so that the Trust is not entirely open in the sense that it cannot be used by members of the State Church. But, speaking generally, these Open Trusts did not particularize any doctrines which must be held and taught by the congregation and ministers. They certainly did not imply that those who established them were unorthodox, or contemplated becoming unorthodox, but they made it possible for the congregations to become unorthodox without thereby appearing to contradict anything laid down as compulsory in the Trust Deed. This kind of Free Trust is perfectly compatible with Orthodoxy, and many orthodox chapels have such Free Trusts to-day. It is quite possible for a Church with a Free Trust to impose a Creed on its congregation and its minister. It is quite possible for it to belong to a Creed-bound organization. A Church with a Free Trust may join a Baptist Union which regards Adult Baptism as essential, though nothing be said about Adult Baptism in its Trust. A Church with a Free Trust might join a Unitarian Society which regards denial of the doctrine of the

Trinity as essential, though nothing be said about denial of the Trinity in its Trust. Of course such Congregations might change their views in time, and separate themselves from such Union and still retain the use of their Chapels, but at any particular time in its history a Free Trust Chapel may belong to a definite doctrinal sect, and may do its best by imposing a Creed on its members, and by strong creedal association, to keep its members true to its doctrines.

"Free Church" has a third meaning which Unitarians, partly under the influence of Channing and Martineau, have adopted. A Free Church, in this modern sense, is not only a Church which imposes no Creed as a condition of membership: it is a Church which regards the worship of God as of supreme importance, and the difference in modes of worship and in form of doctrine as of minor importance. So far as our Presbyterian ancestors are concerned, it may be said that, while they had definite beliefs of their own, they did not, for the most part, attempt to render those beliefs permanent by demanding subscription to them from their members. It was on this account that in many chapels the change from Trinitarianism to Arianism, and from Arianism to Unitarianism was gradual and easy.

There were, of course, those who objected to the change, and fought against it. Sometimes they were successful, and then the Unitarians seceded and built a Chapel of their own; sometimes they failed, and then it was the orthodox who seceded and the Unitarians who remained. The important point to recognize is, that while the members of the congregations in each generation had definite beliefs, there was no definite Creed holding them permanently together, and the breath of modern thought could penetrate among them

unhindered by the exclusiveness of a fixed and binding dogma.

The influence of Richard Baxter was great among these early Nonconformists. His desire was that the Presbyterians should have offered to Parliament the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments as essentials or fundamentals which at least contain all that is necessary to salvation, and when it is said "a Socinian or a Baptist will subscribe all this, I answered so much the better and so much the fitter it is to be a matter of our concord".

A Free Church for the Baxterian was not so much a Church which, owing to absence of Creeds, was made capable of change. Too much has been made by Unitarians of the supposed preparation for change. It is very doubtful if the idea of developing thought and change of doctrines was in the mind of most of the Presbyterians who believed in freedom. They wanted liberty for men to worship God in their own way, according to their own conscience, unhindered by the State, and unhindered by the dogmas of any particular sect, but they did not contemplate any great alteration in belief. They did not imagine that Free Churches now orthodox would become Unitarian, and they certainly did not desire it.

What they wanted most was *inclusiveness*. What they disliked most was exclusiveness. It is perfectly possible to have a Church free from State control, free from Trust Deed control, and even free from the control of a self-imposed Creed, and yet an exclusive Church, a Church that is separated from other Churches, and which enjoys its separation.

It is to be noted that Presbyterians in 1662 had no objection to a State Church. They wanted inclusion in

the State Church, without having to accept doctrines which they could not believe.

The Free Churches from which Unitarians have descended have never laid much stress on freedom from State control. What they wanted was to belong to a National Church which was broad enough to permit them to become its members without demanding subscription to Creeds and Articles which seemed to them untrue. That desire for inclusion belongs to the tradition of Unitarianism. It is a very different position from that of the Congregationalists. To them a State Church is definitely undesirable. What they mean by a Free Church is essentially an independent Church. For the old Presbyterian and for modern Unitarians a Free Church was a Church whose members were not bound by specific creeds. Their ideal was an inclusive Church which would accept as its members all those who desired to follow Christ, and which would permit various forms of worship, according to the beliefs of its worshippers, to be conducted within its communion. It was a vain hope that the Act of Uniformity should be repealed, and it still remains a vain hope. Our present National Church is, undoubtedly, very inclusive. The differences between High Anglicans, Low Churchmen, and Modernists are very deep. Probably the differences among members of the English National Church to-day, protected as it seems to be by its Articles and Creeds and Prayer Book, are greater and more fundamental than in any Nonconformist Church. The differences amongst Unitarians who are without a binding creed are less serious and far reaching than the differences between members of the Anglican Church from one another. Nowhere has the attempt to obtain unity and strength by imposing the common acceptance of Articles,

Creeds, and Prayer Book so manifestly broken down. The Articles are signed, but do not bind, the Creeds are repeated, but not accepted, the Prayer Book is used, but is interpreted in many different ways. This apparent unity is preserved only by ignoring the authority which is supposed to be essential to unity.

A National Church is conceivable in which the Articles should be abolished, the Lord's Prayer should be substituted as a bond of union instead of the Apostles' Creed, and in which a Prayer Book, representing the devout utterances of Christians of all types of thought, should be used selectively by its members. This would lay no strain on the veracity of the worshippers, and would reduce discipline to a point at which it could be accepted by all who desire order and unity.

It may be a vain hope. It may seem, even to the broadest-minded Anglicans, an impossible or absurd ideal. But it was the ideal of Baxter and the early Presbyterians, first for the National Church, and then, when they were frustrated in this ideal, for their own Church. It was also the ideal of Martineau and many of the leading Unitarians since his time. A Free Church meant for them an inclusive Church. It was not an exclusive sect, but a Catholic community. Their ideal is often misunderstood by outsiders, and is by no means wholly accepted by all Unitarians themselves.

It is often supposed that an inclusive Church must be a Church in which no definite beliefs are taught, a Church which, in Emerson's words, is "a mush of concession". This was certainly not Martineau's view. Speaking to the Unitarian Association in 1869, he says, "It has been supposed that these principles would lead to a certain degree of neutrality, coldness, and indifference as to the propagation of doctrines. I boldly maintain

that it is the only principle consistent with perfect outspokenness, definiteness, clearness, and zeal in the propagation of particular doctrines. So long as I understand that when I am in the pulpit I commit nobody, that I speak for nobody but myself, that I am only explaining what my own conscience obliges me to teach, so long as I speak definitely and distinctly, I have no hesitation: I have nobody to consult but my own conscience. So long as I know that the members of my Congregation are not committed or compromised by any thing I say, I teach my Unitarianism, or whatever it may be, with perfect distinctness. But if I felt as a Minister that I was head of a Society, if I supposed that I was actually conducting it, as it were, through a kind of theological history which I was fixing, and which I should be unable to reverse, I should feel a degree of scruple and hesitation, and should be disposed to stifle these distinctions of doctrine. . . . In doctrine I am entirely with you. I am a Unitarian, I think the principles of Unitarianism are of great importance. I have again and again, in private and in public, advocated those principles, and it is a shame that those of us who hesitate to commit our congregation to them should be exposed to the calumny of caring nothing for our theological opinions".

In the letter to the Rev. J. Porter, already referred to, he asserts very strongly the duty of saying what we believe. "While I frankly acknowledge that other men's faith may be to them as good as my own, and feel therefore little call of *benevolence* to make proselytes, I look with horror upon all disingenuousness or even indifference about the free expression and fearless maintenance of our personal convictions. No man can have a deep persuasion without living it: and he is neither

true to himself nor trustful in God if he does not avow it with simplicity, defend it with earnestness, and see that it has its place in the mighty competition for human souls."

This was a claim on behalf of a free, unbound, inclusive Church, and at the same time an assertion of the right and duty of each minister to teach the truth as he knows it, with clear and definite expression. It recalls the words of Dr. John Taylor, of Norwich, a fearless champion of Anti-trinitarian thought in the eighteenth century. The passage in the Norwich Sermon is as follows: "We are Christians and only Christians, a name, which in its original and true meaning includes all that is virtuous and amiable, just and good, noble and divine, excellent and heavenly. Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists, Calvinists, Arians, Trinitarians, and others are names of religious distinctions. But however we may be commonly ranked under any of these divisions, we reject them all. We disown all connection, except that of love and good will, with any sect or party whatsoever: and we consider all our fellow-Protestants of every denomination in the same light, only as Christians, and cordially embrace them all in affection and charity as such. This edifice is founded upon no party principles, but is built on purpose, and with the very design to keep ourselves clear from them all".

This appears to suggest vagueness in Theology, and yet Dr. Taylor was one of the most forcible and learned writers against the orthodox doctrines of Original Sin and vicarious sacrifice, and under his influence the congregation at Norwich became Arian, if not Unitarian. The ideal of a Communion of Free Churches, which are united in what seem to them the fundamental truths

of Christianity, and which seek to include all who desire to worship God and follow Christ and work for the coming of his kingdom, does not exclude definite teaching from the pulpit. The two ideals, that of inclusiveness and loyalty to the truth as we know it, are not incompatible. The ideal was expressed by Dr. Martineau when he said, "If we could fling our dissensions away and seize the field left open for a Catholic Nonconformity, there is room and opportunity for a Church of simple righteousness which might stand until its adversaries own it and drop into it" (*Life*, by Dr. Drummond, i. 420).

At the same time it has to be recognized that there are very distinct limits to this inclusiveness for any Church which has any principles at all. A Free Church is sometimes regarded as a Church in which anything may be said, and in which any beliefs may be promulgated. It is quite evident that a Church in which the minister preaches Atheism, and in which there is no public prayer, or a Church in which the minister is merely a political agent for any one of the parties in the State, is not a true Church. It has excluded itself from the Christian tradition and Christian principles. There must be some common principles, some common beliefs as a basis of Free Church unity. On the other hand, it is equally evident that Churches which regard these common principles and beliefs as an entirely inadequate expression of Christian thought and life and doctrine, will refuse to be included. Martineau himself saw this, although he may not have seen quite so clearly its implications. "No one", he says, writing to Mrs. H. A. Bright in 1866, "expects that the old type of theology, born from antagonisms—Calvinist and Arminian, Athanasian and Unitarian—can ever gather themselves

round the same sanctuary: and these forced unions in France and Geneva and elsewhere can produce only uneasy results. The reason is obvious, and removes these cases wholly from the present argument. In these opposing systems you have to do not with intellectual differences only, but with contradictory terms of *salvation*, and to unite them would be to frame a common liturgy for heaven and hell. Wherever the idea of orthodoxy as a condition of divine acceptance is retained, heterodox people cannot be owned as of the same religion. But is that any reason why we, who have never groaned under that bondage, should not open our doors wide to the many who all around us are fast escaping too?"

Here it is evident that while Martineau would have his inclusive Free Church live in sympathetic fellowship with all forms of faith, he has not very much expectation or even desire that orthodox Churches should be at one with the Free Church. Those whom he expects and desires are the people who have broken away from orthodoxy because they no longer believe in it. There are few people, if any, who break away from a creed-bound Church if they believe entirely in the Creed of that Church. That a man who believes in the Apostles' Creed should object to repeat it, or should object to belong to a Church which makes its repetition obligatory on its members, is a subtle situation which rarely arises. The Presbyterians did not break away from the Anglican Church because they objected to signing Articles which they believed or repeating Creeds they believed or using a Prayer Book with which they agreed. They broke away because of various points in which they disagreed. They still accepted much, but they could not accept the whole which the Anglican Church demanded of them.

There are, indeed, some Unitarians who have asserted that they would not sign a Creed on any terms, even though they approved of every word of it. They are entirely right if they understand by such signature, not merely an acceptance of certain doctrines as true for them at the time when they sign it, but as binding formulae which they promise to adhere to throughout their lives. In the latter case it would be a hindrance to development of thought. But there can be no reason why a man should not repeat a Creed in which he believes, so long as it is clear that by so doing he is not pledging himself to go on saying the same words for all time, whether he believes them or not. The fact is, that the refusal to make Orthodox Creeds the basis of Church Fellowship is tantamount to the rejection of those Creeds. Those who believe in them as essential to salvation must make them the basis of Church Fellowship. They may cultivate kindly sympathetic feelings towards other Churches who do not regard these beliefs as essential, but the man who believes in the Catholic doctrine of the Mass or of the Church, and the man who believes in the orthodox doctrine of the atonement and justification by faith, and original sin, cannot associate on equal terms with Churches where these doctrines are not essential. Any Church which says that the doctrine of the Mass or the doctrine of justification by faith is not essential, really asserts its disbelief in these doctrines. They are either central or they are untrue. They are either an essential element in Church worship and Church teaching, or they are of no permanent value. They are all or nothing. Real orthodoxy cannot accept anything else than itself as the irreducible minimum of what is necessary to salvation. It may look with interest on other forms of faith, it may feel it has

something to learn from them, it may recognize the good life with reverence in the most unlikely places, but it cannot possibly unite with a Free Church in full communion in which its own fundamental doctrines are not accepted as fundamental. It cannot possibly agree to accept as a basis of unity, belief in God and the soul, and reverence for the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. That is what some liberal thinkers, and perhaps even Martineau, have not always realized. They have felt deep respect for orthodoxy, they have learnt much from it, they have interpreted its doctrines as impressive symbols of a veiled truth, they have hoped for a Church which would include the orthodox as well as themselves, but the basis of their Church has always been unorthodox. No doubt a belief in God and in the soul and in the Gospel of Jesus is included in orthodoxy. But if that is all which is required, it leaves out doctrines which are of infinite importance to orthodoxy.

In asking them to come in they are asked to accept what may be called Unitarianism or Free Christianity, as the maximum which is absolutely necessary. The liberal thinker may tell them that they may add on their own special doctrines as they choose, but in asking them to admit him to full fellowship, he is requiring them to admit that his belief is sufficient, and that what they may believe in addition to what he believes is not really essential.

The inclusive Church which desires Catholic fellowship must have a minimum of belief in which all agree. It must have a Greatest Common Measure, i.e. a belief which is to be found in all the Churches which are to be united. That Greatest Common Measure will be the belief of the Church which has diverged farthest from orthodoxy, and which has cast off most of the old

doctrines. The Greatest Common Measure will be really Unitarianism, i.e. a belief in the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the teaching and ideals of Jesus.

A Free Church, then, which imposes no creed on its ministers or members, and whose only foundation is belief in God and Christian discipleship, cannot expect to include orthodox Christians in its communion. It will appeal to the unorthodox. It will attract those who want religious fellowship without doctrinal bonds. Some may still retain a tinge of orthodoxy, and may even describe themselves as Trinitarian, but the fact that they are in sympathy with a Free Church, which does not insist on the old scheme of salvation as essential, proves that they do not believe in it.

There will be some, on the other hand, whose theology is very vague, and who dislike any attempt to define their idea of God. That which is common to them all is a disbelief in materialism, a faith in the unfettered search for truth, and a conviction that man needs, both for his individual and social salvation, a sense of relationship with the divine and eternal in whom we live and move and have our being.

This is the Church which is universally known amongst other Churches as Unitarian. Sometimes the name is used as a reproach, always it is used as describing a body of men and women who do not believe in the Deity of Christ.

CHAPTER XVI

UNITARIANISM IN THE U.S.A.

IT is well known that Unitarianism in America, especially in "New England", has played an important part in the religious life of the country, and has been made illustrious by many leading preachers and citizens. It must be referred to here, but it cannot be described in the detail it deserves.

Unitarianism in America, far more than in England, was a reaction against extreme Calvinism. Calvinism was more deeply rooted, more prevalent, and more powerful than it was in England. The Established Church of England left room for wider differences of opinion than the early New England Congregational Communities. Amongst the latter there was a discipline and a dogmatism which was alien to the Anglican Church. On the other hand, there was for the Americans no overpowering, dominating State Church, so that in the Independent Congregations diversity of thought and change in doctrinal ideas were more easy and unhampered by authority.

Dr. Wilbur, in his book *Our Unitarian Heritage*, points out that in the early New England Puritan Churches "the doctrines of the Westminster Confession were so much taken for granted that members were usually admitted upon assenting to a simple undogmatic covenant or promise to lead a Christian life". The covenant of the Church at Salem, the first Congregational Church to be formed in America, reads as follows: "We

covenant with the Lord and with one another, and do bind ourselves in the presence of God to walk together in all His ways according as He is pleased to reveal Himself to us in His blessed word of truth".

And yet the "Covenant" was drawn up by a strictly Calvinistic Church which regarded any diversity from their doctrines with abhorrence. This fact should be a warning against supposing that every undogmatic covenant or Open Trust implies an open mind. Men may be so certain of the truth of their doctrines, and so confident of the unity of their Church and its power to keep out heresy, that they take doctrinal agreement for granted, and only insist upon a Christian life.

At the same time this freedom from dogmatic tests gave the opportunity for change, although there was no such idea in the minds of those who drew up the covenant. All through the eighteenth century "Arminianism" was increasing among the old Calvinistic Churches, and caused great anxiety to the Calvinists. What was called the "Great Awakening" began in Western Massachusetts about 1740, under the preaching of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, who came over from England to help him. It was a great Calvinistic revival campaign, and was marked by intense fanaticism and narrow bigotry. Jonathan Edwards was a profound thinker and a great theologian. He was of the same school as John Calvin and John Knox, and he preached Calvinism with passionate conviction and fearless logic. No one could have any doubt as to what Calvinism meant as they listened to his sermons or read his books.

A strong, definite theology has two results. It unites those who agree in a close corporation, and it enables those who are uncertain about their own beliefs to realize their disagreement. Arminianism became more

sure of itself and more pronounced as a reaction against this clear-cut Calvinism. American Liberals began to read English Arian and even Socinian books. Thomas Emlyn's *Humble Inquiry* was reprinted in Boston in 1756, and later on the writings of Price and Priestley and Lindsey were read with eagerness. After the American Revolution there was a rapid movement towards Unitarianism, all the more natural because Arian and Unitarian thinkers had been so strongly upon the American side in their conflict with England.

It is curious that, as in England the first definitely Unitarian Congregation was founded by Lindsey on the basis of a reformed Prayer Book, and with the view of meeting the needs of Liberal Anglicans, so the first definitely Unitarian Congregation in America was King's Chapel, Boston, an English Episcopal Church founded 1686. In 1785 this Chapel, under the leadership of its minister, James Freeman, followed Lindsey's example, and adopted a revised Anglican Liturgy from which all reference to the Trinity and all prayers to Christ were omitted.

After the Revolution, liberal tendencies in the Congregational Churches kept steadily growing. They were somewhat vague in their theology, and insisted more on morality than on doctrine, but their comparative indifference to doctrinal agreement was enough to make them suspected by the orthodox. It was felt, and rightly felt, that to be comparatively indifferent to doctrines implies a growing tendency to disbelieve in them. There were increasing disputes and secessions. When the Calvinists were in the majority the Liberals withdrew and founded new Churches which soon became Unitarian. When, as often happened, the Liberals were in the majority the Calvinists withdrew and the Liberals

remained in possession of the old buildings and endowments. When this happened, there was much natural irritation, as there had been in similar circumstances in England. The orthodox felt themselves aggrieved by the loss of Churches and money which had been provided by ancestors as orthodox as themselves.

The conflict came to a crisis in 1805, over the appointment of the Professor of Divinity in Harvard College. The Liberals supported the Rev. Henry Ware, whom the orthodox regarded as a Unitarian. In spite of strenuous and bitter opposition he was elected, and his election was followed by the appointment of a Liberal President and several Liberal Professors. It was felt by the orthodox that Harvard College had been captured by the Unitarians, and in 1808 the Andover Theological Seminary was founded. It was determined that there should be no possibility of its being captured hereafter by Unitarians or any other heretics, for its constitution required the Professors every five years to renew their subscription to a Creed which was to remain "entirely and identically the same, without the least alteration, addition, or diminution".[1] From this time onwards the orthodox became more embittered, and Liberals were forced to defend themselves and to formulate their own beliefs more definitely. They were charged by the orthodox with evasions and even with hypocrisy, because they had said so little about doctrines. They shrank

[1] Their Creed as time went on became an increasing burden and was practically ignored. In 1905 the Seminary removed to Cambridge, Mass., and entered into alliance with its old enemy, the Harvard Divinity School. In 1922 the two Schools were merged into one, on a non-sectarian basis. This was followed by a protest from the orthodox, who called in the law to their aid. The result is that Andover has again become a separate theological seminary, training men in orthodoxy in accordance with its Trust Deed.

from the rather aggressive Unitarianism of Priestley and Belsham. As Dr. Channing said, "We preach precisely as if no such doctrine as the Trinity had ever been known. We all of us think it best to preach what we esteem to be the truth, and to say very little about speculative error".

W. C. Gannett, in the *Life* of his father, Dr. Gannett, describes the position in the early nineteenth century, between the Liberals and the orthodox, in a suggestive and impartial way. "Channing's principle of avoiding controversy because the points denied seemed to be of little moment to real religion, while religious controversy was most direful in its consequences—this was doubtless the deepest motive with them all. They saw that clear statement on certain points would make a bitter schism in the dear old Church of their forefathers, and they could not bear that thought—so that a curious phenomenon was seen in the religious world. These free thinkers were standing as the advocates of vague thinking and dim speech, while the orthodox were the defenders of the right to think and the duty of speaking distinctly in religion! A curious, but not rare, phenomenon, wherever a Liberal party is moving forward." This kind of language and thought is not unknown among "Modernists" to-day.

Under the influence of orthodox attacks the Unitarians became more aware of themselves and more united. Channing's famous Baltimore sermon in 1819 gave both life and definition to the Unitarian position, and for a time, Unitarianism became the faith of many, if not most, of the leading citizens and thinkers of New England. As in England, it was a definitely Biblical Unitarianism.

What is called Channing Unitarianism included belief

in a supernatural revelation, confirmed by miracle, and in a Christ of a superhuman nature. At the same time, Channing's influence and spirit prepared the way for further developments. Channing's gospel was essentially the infinite worth of human nature. "Hence", says Mr. Gannett, "all his love of liberty. Hence all his plans for social regeneration. Hence the meanest man to him was an immortal, and brought thoughts of grandeur."

"All minds are of one family", he said. "Yes, Christ, though so far above us, is still one of us, is only an illustration of the capacity we all possess. Each man should feel the greatness of his own spirit—that it is so great as to justify all the mighty operations of Christianity, were there no other spirit which needed redemption." "The truths I have insisted on are written, not from tradition, but from deep conviction—may I not say from inspiration? I mean nothing miraculous. Does not God speak in us all?" And he scrupled not to say of Reason in comparison with Revelation, "The truth is, and it ought not to be denied, that our ultimate reliance is, and must be, on our own reason. I am surer that my rational nature is from God alone, than that any book is an expression of His will."

This position involves not merely a change of emphasis, but the recognition of a new ultimate authority. It means as between the authority of the Bible and the authority of reason or the divine Logos in man "I must decrease and he must increase".

Channing himself did not take the next step, but he prepared the way. In English Unitarianism the advance was made more gradually and quietly than in America, although in England, too, Dr. Martineau and those who thought with him had to meet much hostility from the old Biblical Unitarians.

In New England the protagonist of the change, from a belief in the authority of the Bible to a full recognition of the authority of reason and conscience, was a much more militant personality than Martineau.

Theodore Parker (1800–60) was a man of vigorous intellect and boundless courage. He had Channing's belief in human nature, but hardly, perhaps, Channing's reverence for human nature. Channing's reverence for human nature made him hate controversy: he was inclined to respect the opinions of his critics, and to look always for points of agreement and avoid points of difference. He spoke the truth in love. Reverence for human nature makes it distasteful to contradict any one's honest opinion. Channing's aim always was to see the truth behind the error. Parker's character was far more incisive and uncompromising. What he knew he knew clearly, and what he believed he believed confidently. He would make no terms with what he regarded as false or evil. He was a devoted and loyal friend, and quickly moved by signs of affection, but he had a scathing tongue and pen with which he condemned what seemed to him false opinions and cowardly thought and base actions. He hated the slave trade, and was prepared to go any lengths in breaking the law, rather than allow fugitive slaves to be recaptured in Massachusetts and sent back to their masters. He was a great political and moral force in Boston, where his Sunday sermons and lectures aroused immense enthusiasm and also great opposition. The older Unitarians were shocked, both by his methods and his opinions. He gave up definitely the authority of the Bible and the superhuman elements in Jesus. He had a profound belief in God and a great reverence for Jesus. His *religion* was practically the same as Channing's, but

the basis of his religion was changed. As Dr. Gannett, one of the old Unitarians, who was most pained by Parker's position, and who was yet most anxious to be fair to him, pointed out, "The historical facts of religion are, in strictness of speech, its *proofs* rather than its *truths*". It was the old Unitarian proofs of religion, based on the Bible, which Parker denied, not the truths which the old Unitarians had taught. These truths, on the whole, remained for Parker the same, only more vital, more cogent, more divine, because he found them in his own soul. For many Unitarians of his day this seemed a vague subjectivism. It was certainly a tremendous change, and we have not yet seen the full consequences of this change of which Martineau in England and Parker in America were the leaders.

Some words from a speech of Dr. Gannett will express the old Unitarian point of view. "You know, my friends, how tenacious I am of faith in the miraculous mission and superhuman authority of Christ. To me, this Gospel is the very word and grace of God. Without him, as a divinely inspired, a special and sufficient teacher, I should have no mercy to lean on, no hope to cherish: for I cannot discover in natural religion any instruction adequate to my need as a sinner and as one over whom death will assert its power. The decay of faith in him, I am persuaded, would turn back the current of civilization, and deprive man of his dearest spiritual resources. It is through Christ alone, as I think, that men are authorized to call upon God as the Father, or that a sinful world can ever realize the salvation after which it is groping." "From the inmost places of my being, I cry out for the one Mediator between God and man. But I do not the less abhor the temper which imputes evil motives to those who will not sit at his

feet, and ascribes all unbelief to a bad heart. Such loyalty to the name of Christ is disloyalty to his spirit and example" (*Life of Dr. Gannett*, p. 336).

Parker died in 1860, at fifty years of age, worn out by his conflicts with political injustice and denominational bigotry. He did not live to see, as Martineau saw in England, the new Unitarianism in which the old proofs from a miraculous revelation were given up, while the old truths remained.

Since his time American Unitarianism has developed very much on the same lines as English Unitarianism. As in England, so also in America, especially in the Middle West, there are some Churches where the Bible and the Christian tradition are largely ignored, and where the worship of God has passed into a cultivation of religious psychology, united with social propaganda. In Churches with no creed to bind them together, such idiosyncrasies cannot be avoided. For those who believe in a creed as essential to any unity, the wonder must be that the departures from type are so few, and that any unity remains. Both in England and America, the great majority of Churches called Unitarian remain definitely Christian. The old fundamental truths of Christianity are believed and preached. God is worshipped, the Bible is revered, Jesus is regarded as the supreme example of the divine in man. The old doctrines of the Incarnation and the Atonement are not rejected as wholly false, but reinterpreted so that they become symbols of universal truths. There is no break with the past. Unitarians differ from the orthodox much less in what they believe than in why they believe it. It is significant that Theodore Parker, the uncompromising rationalist, who denied the miraculous, still recognized the leadership and inspiration of Jesus with

passionate devotion. In his well-known hymn he writes:

> Yes! thou art still the Life; thou art the Way
> The holiest know:—Light, Life, and Way of Heaven!
> And they who dearest hope, and deepest pray,
> Toil by the light, life, way, which thou hast given.

CHAPTER XVII

UNITARIAN LAYMEN

IT would be generally acknowledged that Unitarian Laymen have played an important part in civic, industrial, educational, and national life. There is no other denomination, except the Society of Friends, which in proportion to its numbers has produced so many men and women who have been marked by high character, simple piety, and a desire to serve their fellow-men.

The actual number of avowed Unitarians cannot be given. There are, no doubt, at present, very many both amongst orthodox Churches and among the unattached who are Unitarians in the sense that they believe in God and reverence Jesus Christ, while disbelieving in the orthodox scheme of salvation and in a miraculous Revelation. Those, however, who are actually connected with the Free Christian Churches known as Unitarian, are, and have been, comparatively few.

The number of such Churches, as given in the official list published by Essex Hall, is, for England, 277; for Wales, 33; for Scotland, 7; and for Ireland (chiefly in Antrim and Down), 37. It may be estimated that there are between twenty and thirty thousand members in England, exclusive of Sunday Schools[1] and of casual worshippers who are in general sympathy with the

[1] The statistics of 1926 for the Sunday Schools connected with Unitarian Congregations are: 2,700 teachers; 25,300 scholars, of whom 5,700 are over sixteen years of age.

Services. At any rate, it is a small number as compared with the membership of Congregational, Wesleyan, or Baptist Churches.

On the other hand, in many of the large towns a considerable proportion of the leading citizens, and the most respected merchants and manufacturers, and the most energetic reformers in education and in social affairs have been Unitarians. Such names as Chamberlain, Stansfield, Nettlefold, Kenrick, Greg, Ashton, Darbishire, Rathbone, Holt, Martineau, and very many others, have been and are honoured, not only in their own cities, but in the country at large, as public-spirited citizens, generous supporters of education and reform, and men to be trusted in public and private life for their integrity, their wisdom, and their devotion to duty.

What the Hon. H. L. Fisher says of Thomas Ashton, in his *Life of James Bryce*, is typical of the kind of influence exerted by many leading Unitarians. "He held a commanding position as the chief partner in a great merchant's business and in a large cotton-spinning firm, and was one of the principal forces in the humanizing movement of the Victorian Age, which brought Art, Music, and the higher learning to the great capital of the Cotton Industry."

Education, in all its grades, owes much to Unitarians. Many chapels formerly had Day Schools attached to them, where education was given on more liberal lines than in the National Schools. When Elementary Education was taken over by the State and freed from creedal bonds, most of these schools were given up or handed over to the School Boards. The University Colleges in great cities, many of which have become Universities, were largely promoted by Unitarians. These men were

marked by a strong belief in liberal education, and by a deep sense of duty towards the poor and ignorant.

Domestic Missions were founded by Unitarians in Liverpool and London in 1835, as a result of the preaching of the Rev. Joseph Tuckerman, from Boston, U.S.A. The object of the Domestic Missions is well described in the Liverpool Domestic Mission: "To establish intercourse with families of the neglected poor —to promote the order and comfort of their homes, to bring them into a permanent connection with religious influence, to promote an effective education of their children, and to shelter them from corrupting agencies". These Missions were not founded to promote Unitarianism, but to educate and help the poor by personal sympathy and instruction.

Much of the work of Unitarians has been done outside their Churches, and as citizens, not as denominationalists. They support their own Churches and Institutions generously, but they are equally generous in their support of civic and educational needs.

Unitarians are often described as cold and rationalistic, but this charge is exaggerated. There is something in the best of them which might be compared to Cordelia, whose nature it was "to love and be silent", but when the need arises, that love can express itself in active benevolence and heroic effort. There is an underlying tenderness and piety which finds expression in undemonstrative ways. They dislike ceremonialism and suspect loud professions. A spirit of devotion is often strongly marked in the simplicity of their worship. Some well-known hymns which are sung in churches of every denomination were written by Unitarians. As examples of such well-known hymns may be quoted "Nearer my God to Thee", by Sarah Adams; "In the Cross of Christ

I glory", by Sir John Bowring; and "Come, Kingdom of our God", by J. Johns, the first Domestic Missionary in Liverpool. There are many others to be found in hymn books used by Unitarians, by Stopford Brooke, Martineau, Sadler, Hopps, Tarrant, etc. They express joy and confident faith and thankfulness in simple and sincere language, and some of them are marked by poetic beauty of form and by imaginative power. Unitarian hymn-writers in America have written hymns of at least equal worth. Amongst them may be mentioned especially W. C. Gannett, F. L. Hosmer, Russell Lowell, Theodore Parker, Samuel Longfellow, and Samuel Johnson. These hymns are quite free from any sectarian spirit. They might be sung in any Christian Church without appearing to be out of place. It is probable that they are used by many Churches who have no idea that they were written by Unitarians.

There is considerable variety among Congregations as to the form of worship. In some Churches there is what is called a "Free Service", on the lines generally followed in other Nonconformist Churches. In the Free Service the prayers are usually written or delivered *ex tempore* by the minister himself. In other Churches, however, a Liturgy is used with or without a Free Prayer by the minister.

The best known of these Liturgies is called "The Ten Services". The first two of these services are modified forms of the morning and evening service in the Anglican Prayer Book. Several of them are compiled from devotional Christian literature. The ninth and tenth consist of prayers composed by Martineau, and may be claimed as the most classic expression of the spirit of religion in its penitence, aspiration, and worship, to be found among Unitarians. A more recent Liturgy

is that used in Manchester College, Oxford, drawn up and partly composed by Dr. Jacks, the Principal. This, too, contains prayers in which the need and trust of the free religious spirit are expressed with great simplicity and truth.

Of course, a large number of hymns and printed prayers used by Unitarians come from orthodox sources, either Roman Catholic or Protestant. It belongs to the nature of Prayer and Praise and to the language of devotion generally, that it transcends the bounds of dogmatic theology and speaks in the voice of catholic religion. The worship in Unitarian Congregations is marked, not only by sincerity, but by a spirit of devotion. There is no suggestion of a desire to emphasize doctrinal differences, but rather a sense of belonging to the Church Universal. It may be justly claimed that the ideal of Unitarian Congregations is that which is expressed in the Anglican Prayer Book, "to hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace and in righteousness of life".

CHAPTER XVIII

PRESENT CONDITION OF UNITARIANISM

THE present condition of Congregations known as Unitarian is disconcerting and difficult to explain. It is the more perplexing because it is evident that there are a large and increasing multitude of people to whom orthodoxy, even liberal orthodoxy, does not appeal. They do not believe in the Creeds or in the Miracles. They do not believe in the Deity of Christ. The whole orthodox scheme of thought is alien to their minds. At the same time, they are not irreligious or indifferent to ideals or careless of duty. They have a deep sense of the sufferings of the poor: they are, many of them, obsessed by the evil and injustice of the world. They have an intense hatred of cruelty and oppression. They have a strong faith in the possibility of social regeneration. The prevailing temper among such idealists is a triumphant optimism reacting against and arising out of the recognition of evil. Just as in the old orthodox scheme of salvation the conviction of sin precedes and leads on to faith in the saving grace of God, so amongst many moderns the feeling of the evil and injustice in the world precedes and leads on to a belief in the possibility of a regenerated society.

There is an underlying faith in God behind such a conviction. There is the belief in a divine purpose, a divine intention in the world, the belief that oppression, injustice, cruelty, selfishness, war, are out of harmony with the true ideals of life; that they are unnatural, not

merely unnecessary. Nothing but that faith indeed will sustain reformers and idealists amidst the endless disillusionments, disappointments, and failures which they must encounter. They have as many perils and hardships to fear as St. Paul. "Perils in the city, perils in the wilderness, perils in the sea, perils amongst false brethren." It is not merely opposition from without, but disunity and disloyalty within, which tries the faith and challenges the courage of those who work for righteousness and peace.

These idealists are, for the most part, not interested at all in theology, by which they mean sectarian discussions about Creeds. Their main interest is in social justice and peace. The old discussions about the Trinity or Unity, the Incarnation or Atonement, mean nothing to them. They have a work to do, a purpose that they may fulfil. Denominational discussions seem to them beating the air.

It would be untrue to say of them that they have no personal ideal of honour, loyalty, courage, and love, no remorse for their own weaknesses, and no feeling of dependence upon the grace of God; but no doubt the emphasis is laid on doing something for the world in which they live, to make the "crooked straight and the rough places plain".

They regard the Churches of all denominations with a certain suspicion. They think the Churches are too often on the side of established evils, or, at any rate, too inclined to preach "Peace, peace, when there is no peace". They charge them with preaching submission and patience under intolerable evils. So far as the Churches do this, they are evidently out of harmony with true Christianity. The aim of the Gospel is assuredly to make men individually realize the evil in themselves

and their capacity for good that they may repent and follow Christ, but it is equally its aim to make men feel the evil in their social life and its capacity for good in order that they may repent and seek after the ideal.

No denomination deserves all the criticism which is lavished on all Churches to-day. The "pomp of Spires" bears witness to

> Something more than earth, that man requires.

There is a feeling of a divine meaning in life, of the love of God, and of the claim of righteousness, inherent in all sincere Church worship. But for many people this effect is interfered with by forms of worship and modes of thought which seem to them untrue and unreal.

In such an atmosphere of criticism and faith, of emancipation from orthodoxy, united with great hopes for man, of dislike for the conventional and desire for the real, of disinclination merely to talk about Jesus, and a great reverence for his principles and spirit, it would seem that the Congregations called Unitarian would make a special appeal, and that they might be expected to express in a simpler form the religion which is native to the hearts and minds of men.

It has to be admitted that, on the whole, this is not the case. A few exceptional preachers gather large congregations round them, but, speaking generally, Unitarian Congregations are small. They are regarded by many of the orthodox as outside the Christian Church, and by many of the unorthodox as ineffective and cold pale copies of the past, rather than heralds of the dawn. Most critics would recognize that Unitarians have often been public-spirited citizens, and that there are men and women of high character and generous beneficence amongst them. They would recognize in

them considerable intelligence and a strong belief in liberty. They would admit the morality, but doubt the religion of Unitarians. They would admit the freedom, but doubt the convictions; they would admit the individual strength, but doubt the corporate piety.

There is, no doubt, some truth in these criticisms. It is an extremely difficult enterprise to build up a Free Church whose only foundation is a belief in God and a reverence for the spirit and teaching of Jesus. It is all the more difficult because it looks so simple. A Church whose basis should be the Lord's Prayer, which should ask for no metaphysical definition of God and no creed as to the nature of Christ, has been desired by many. It is such a Church which modern Unitarians are trying to build up, but few outsiders who long for such high communion and such catholic fellowship seem to recognize this Church in Unitarianism. Its intellectual freedom seems to pass so easily into intellectual licence, its simplicity seems to pass so easily into vagueness, its catholicity of statement seems to pass so easily into intolerance of spirit.

Membership of the Free Church usually called Unitarian is generally permitted to any one who subscribes a certain amount per year to the Church funds. The amount required to become a voting member varies in different Churches, as does the age at which membership is allowed, but in few, if any, Congregations are questions asked as to belief or even character. No doubt this method works, on the whole, fairly well. Men do not wish to give money to a Church or Institution unless they are in general sympathy with what they understand to be the purposes of such a Church or Institution. They rarely join in order to gain power to prevent these purposes. But the method admits of very

great variety of thought and character within the same Church, and yet more within the same group of Churches. The only bond of union amongst them may be a common dislike to make any profession of belief at all. Few Unitarians would be willing to advocate any imposition of belief as a condition of membership. They see the difficulties of association on the lines of general sympathy and liberal sentiments, but they feel even more strongly the danger of demanding adhesion to a creed. There is something attractive to them in the idea of unpledged, free minds, with differing thoughts and beliefs, meeting together for worship and for prayer. It is a daring experiment!

This type of full Church membership dependent only on a subscription is almost unique amongst Christian Churches. Some belief is either expressed or implied for full membership in orthodox Churches. Among Unitarians no questions are asked, and nothing is implied, except that it may be supposed that the new subscriber is in general sympathy with the teaching of the Church of which he desires to become a member. But that teaching might consist conceivably mainly in lectures on Art and Literature: it might consist in lectures on Science: it might consist in lectures on the New Psychology, or an attack on Orthodoxy, or in attacks on Capitalism. General sympathy with the preacher might put the Church into the hands of voting members who were mainly interested in Literature or Science, or members who desired nothing but the last new theories in Psychology, or members who regarded their Church as an instrument for attacking every form of Christianity or every form of economic theory different from their own.

There is no method by which a Free Church true

to its principles can wholly avoid these dangers. It is an inherent weakness in an undogmatic Church. But we are justified in claiming also that it is a great ideal, and that it may be a great strength.

The weakness of divided counsels and of Congregations at the mercy of cranks is not confined to the Free Churches. In the Anglican Church itself, although all members repeat the same Creeds and sign the same Articles and use the same Prayer Book, there are very deep differences of belief; there are extremists whom it passes the power of the Bishops to control. These men think and act for themselves.

The Free Congregations, usually called Unitarian, stand alone in their full acceptance of religious, as distinguished from ecclesiastical, democracy. All the so-called Free Churches accept ecclesiastical democracy. It is a more difficult and hazardous course to accept religious democracy. This means rejecting as an ultimate authority Church or Bible or Christ, and appealing to each man's reason and conscience. It means the refusal to impose any Creed as a condition of Church membership, or as the condition of ministering in a Free Church. The result may be, in some cases, disunity and confusion. It may often entail weakness and failure. A Church, bound together by strong negations and strong affirmations, which every member is required to accept, will appear more effective and will gather into its fold determined partisans. Its exclusiveness will give it an appearance of authority. It is a Church which is seeking to dominate others; it is not an educative, but a ruling force. You cannot justifiably retain full freedom of thought within its membership.

The logical alternative for which Unitarians have been prepared by their history is the alternative of a

Free, Undogmatic Church Fellowship. It has been pointed out above that such a Free Church, however wide its sympathies, cannot hope to have the genuinely orthodox in its communion. To refuse to impose the authority of Church, Bible, or Christ on a Free Religious Fellowship implies that we do not accept them as ultimate authorities. There is, therefore, a negative as well as a positive aspect about the principles of such a Church.

The orthodox scheme of salvation, as expressed in the old doctrine of the Atonement and the Incarnation, is not accepted: the vague claims made for the authority of Christ as the Messiah, by more liberal Christians, are not accepted. If any of these doctrines were accepted, they would be so fundamentally important that they would be rightly regarded as having ultimate authority.

But the negations by themselves do not make up a religion. It might even be said that they have nothing whatever to do with religion. No doubt it is the duty of a religious man and a mark of his religion to suffer persecution for the truth, and to refuse to say he believes what he does not believe. But the expression of mere doubts to-day is a very popular and even fashionable and remunerative employment. There are many who "disbelieve the things that they disbelieve much more whole-heartedly than they believe the things that they believe". No Church can be built up by men whose disbelief is positive and their belief negative.

The fundamental faith of the Free Congregations, usually called Unitarian, is in the religious nature of men which develops best through the free use of Reason and Conscience. This is not a mere psychological faith that there are certain qualities in man which may be described as religious, and which need to be expressed. It is the faith that the religious nature of man implies

God, that the highest in man, which makes him most a man, is a sense of dependence on and communion with an Eternal of whom human love and goodness at their best are dim suggestions. This belief in human nature implies also a deep reverence for the teaching and the life of Jesus. It does not mean accepting him as an ultimate authority, but if human nature is divine, then those in whom that divinity is most pure and perfect can speak to men's hearts with a revealing intimacy and a transcendent power which calls out what is of kin to themselves and makes men more aware of God.

This faith in the religious nature of man, which implies man's supreme need of God and the lasting value of Christ and Christ-like men and women as the inspirers and educators of humanity, is not an easy faith. It is easier to believe in the Bible as the Word of God, in spite of its contradictions, than it is to believe in the religious nature of man. It is easier to believe in the Church, in spite of its aberrations, as the divinely guided instrument of God, than to believe in the religious nature of man.

It is a curious irony that those Christians who profess this most difficult and fundamental of beliefs are often branded as unbelievers. They believe that God has made man in His own image. They can say with St. Paul "now are we children of God". This belief does not involve separation from the Christian Church. It does not mean a vague and formless Theism. It sees the religious nature of man expressing itself often with sublime beauty and with convincing truth in the Bible. It finds its highest ideals expressed and reinforced in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. It finds, in the history and doctrines of the Christian Church and in

the Christian thinkers and prophets of all ages, a witness to the religious nature of man and the revealing love of God.

It sees mistakes in the Bible, and errors and sins in the Church, but it recognizes in them God speaking "unto the fathers by the prophets, by divers portions and in divers manner". They are an expression of the religious nature of men, of their longing for righteousness, of their sorrow for sin, of their dependence upon God, of their hopes for eternal life. Faith in man's nature as divine does not set aside the Bible or the Church or the teaching of Jesus as outworn. The free man and the Free Church will not be dominated by them, but he will reverence them with a more unconstrained devotion and a purer love because he recognizes them no longer as his masters, but as his teachers and his friends. He will look out into the future, both on earth and in heaven, with greater hope and confidence.

CHAPTER XIX

THE FAITH OF UNITARIANS

IT is necessary to point out, in attempting to describe what modern Unitarianism is, that no one can speak authoritatively on the subject. There is no definition which would be accepted by all Unitarians. There are many members of Congregations known as Unitarian who would refuse to define their beliefs for themselves, and who would object to having their beliefs defined for them by others. The general, rather hackneyed, description given by Unitarians of their faith is that they believe in the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of man, and the Leadership of Jesus. These are tremendous, far-reaching affirmations, and it is by no means certain that all so-called Unitarians would accept them, still less that they would all interpret them in the same way. No one writing of modern Unitarianism can claim the right to define its exact limits, or can expect every Unitarian to agree with his description of what it seems to him to be. He must write in his own person, from his own point of view, and must not regard himself or be regarded by others as imposing a creed or fixing limits. He can simply give his own impression, which will be based, not merely on his own knowledge and experience, but probably also on his own beliefs and his own desires. In what follows I must be understood to be giving my own impressions and interpretations.

It is easy to say, "If you Unitarians impose no creed, if you accept as members of your Congregations any

who signify their desire to join, what unity of faith can there be amongst you? If you insist on freedom to believe whatever your reason and conscience bid you believe, and if that is the only bond between you, how can you be certain that you will all arrive at the Fatherhood of God, and the brotherhood of man, and the leadership of Jesus? It is arrogant dogmatism to assert that true freedom of thought must lead to *my* belief. Some men through freedom ot thought may become Trinitarians or Roman Catholics: some may become Agnostics or Atheists. What unity of worship or of faith can there be amongst men who simply believe in freedom of thought? What justification have you for denying that a man has used his reason and conscience who becomes a Fundamentalist or a Theosophist or an Atheist?"

No sensible, unprejudiced man would deny that the use of reason and conscience may lead men to very different results, and may produce many contradictory doctrines in theology and philosophy. It would not even be justifiable to say in theology, as it would be justifiable to say in science, that if the results differ, then reason and conscience, however seriously used, must have been used mistakenly by one or other of the seekers after truth. In questions of scientific fact or of history there are alternatives, where, if the one is true the other is not true. Either the world was created in six days or it was not. Either Adam or Eve ate the apple in Eden and brought sin into the world or they did not. Either Jesus was born miraculously of a virgin or he was not. If reason and conscience lead two men to take opposing views in such matters as these, then, however sincere the reason and clear the consciences of both of them, one is right and the other wrong.

But we cannot say this with the same confidence about the differences between Plato and Aristotle, or between Kant and Hegel, or between J. S. Mill and Martineau. Our sympathies may be with one or the other, but we cannot say of any of them that they have misapplied reason and conscience.

This is equally true of theological doctrines when they are not merely based on history, which they rarely are. All great theological doctrines are based on deep religious experiences: they are profound interpretations, in thought, of a moral and spiritual life. They are visions of God which cannot possibly be explained fully in terms of the intellect.

It would be absurd, then, for any Church to claim that it has a monopoly of reason and conscience, or to assert that reason and conscience, fairly and rightly used, must lead to one Theology. Unitarians certainly do not make this claim.

Nevertheless, there is an underlying Unity amongst us, there are affinities, associations, inherited and innate reverences, a spirit of devotion; there is an atmosphere in which our free thought is exercised.

Our Churches exist for the worship of God, for the deepening of the spiritual life in communion with God, and for Christian morality in personal and social life. This basis includes many differences in theology, but it does not imply that everyone who calls himself a Free Thinker, or who proclaims that he is bound by no creed, will feel himself at home amongst us. We have Christian traditions and principles which involve love to God and man in the spirit of Jesus. We have Puritan traditions and principles which involve belief in righteousness and in the grace of God.

We are free men, but our freedom has made us feel

more, and not less deeply, the infinite value of religion for ourselves and for Society. We are free men, but our freedom has made us realize more, and not less deeply, the value of Church fellowship and worship as a means of realizing the life of the Spirit and as a means of regenerating Society. We have no Creed, but we have a Gospel, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who proclaimed the love of God and the divine nature of man, and who came to call men into the way of peace. It is significant that we have the Lord's Prayer and no Apostles' Creed. We believe that the Lord's Prayer is a closer and stronger bond of union than any Creed. It unites men in aspiration, in reverence, in trust; it breathes the spirit of loving confidence, and it leads us to work with one another and with God for the coming of His Kingdom upon earth.

There are two questions which trouble Unitarians. One question is concerned with the fitness of the name Unitarian as a description of their faith: the other question is how they are to describe the faith itself, by whatsoever name it may be called, to their own satisfaction and for the understanding of outsiders.

The first question, as to the fitness of the name, has given Unitarians perhaps more time and trouble than it deserves. The name is universally applied to our Free Churches and Free Colleges by outsiders, whether we describe them as Free Christian or Liberal Christian, Non-subscribing, Undogmatic, or even Free Catholic. On the other hand, there are many Unitarians who do not like the name and regard it as misleading. They point out that while their Churches have always been free, they were formerly used by congregations who were Presbyterian and orthodox. These congregations did not label their Churches as Trinitarian. Why should

their descendants label our Chapels Unitarian? This argument was strongly urged by Martineau when he said, "If any one, being a Unitarian, shrinks on fitting occasion from plainly calling himself so, he is a sneak and a coward. If, being of our Catholic communion, he calls his chapel or its congregation Unitarian, he is a traitor to his spiritual ancestry and a deserter to the camp of its persecutors". There are many Unitarians who share this point of view, and if the word Unitarian on a Chapel Board is taken to imply that the Church is definitely and finally anti-Trinitarian in its theology, and that it excludes from membership all who may still believe in some kind of Trinitarian theology, it certainly seems to be out of harmony with our Free Church traditions. Those who defend its use on chapel notice boards regard it as a description of the type of thought and worship which at the present time is to be found in the building. They do not wish that it should be read as fixing for all time the theology of the congregation. It has no legal significance. It can be altered as the name of a street can be altered.

The much more important question is, what does Unitarian, as applied to individuals or Churches, really mean at the present time? The Rev. J. J. Tayler, who was one of the most catholic-minded and learned of Unitarians, well said, in a letter to the Rev. J. Hamilton Thom, of Liverpool, in 1859, "I think we make too much pother about a name. It will either die away and be succeeded, through the natural working of events, by another and more appropriate one, or the old name will expand into a broader and nobler significance. All names are to a certain extent inappropriate. But usage and long possession partially rectify the evil. Any deliberate attempt to suppress a name in wide cir-

culation, and artificially to substitute another which must be coined for the occasion, would do more harm than good, and expose us to more suspicion and ridicule than ever".[1]

That is what modern Unitarians feel—that "the old name has expanded for them into a broader and nobler significance". No doubt the word Unitarian originally meant simply a denial of the Trinity and a disbelief especially in the Deity of Christ. That is a very inadequate meaning as a description of Unitarianism to-day. It means, essentially, a belief in God and in the divine nature of man, and it finds that belief in God and in the divine nature of man most fully expressed in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. This is not an arbitrary meaning imposed on the name. It is perfectly clear to those who consider the Churches impartially, that Unitarians represent a type of religion different from all other Christian Churches. It is not now the question whether they are right or wrong: the question is what they are. Martineau, though often critical of the Unitarians of his day, recognized this to the full. "For generations to come", he says in a letter to Mr. Tayler in 1865, "I see no ark of refuge, no retreat for the Christian spirit which is at once catholic and intellectual, but our little Church: and we must keep, if we can, the balance true between the width of its thought and the depth of its devotion."

Leaving out any question of names and any criticism of orthodoxy, there is clearly a place for a free, undogmatic religion side by side with orthodox Churches. This Church will be founded on a belief in God. "I

[1] The term Trinitarian was, in the sixteenth century, applied to heretics holding incorrect views as to the Trinity, and it was often applied, curiously enough, to Unitarians.

cannot conceive", says Martineau, "of a Church without the worship of a living and Personal God." Its principles might be described in the words of St. John's Gospel, "God is Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth". Its belief in God, i.e. its belief in the make of the world and the nature of man as fundamentally good, will enable it to welcome all the real discoveries of science and all the results of true criticism with fearless trust. It will have no doctrines which might be overthrown by historical inquiry, no cosmology which can be destroyed by scientific investigation. This faith in God is well expressed by Martineau in the words "Depend upon it, the facts of the Universe will never prove to be profane".

It is important to realize that this Church, whatever its name, is a community who believe in God. It is not merely a collection of inquirers or of social reformers, or of men and women who want to be good in order to make others good. Its basis is a belief in an eternal and supreme Reality of righteousness and love. It does not demand any definition of God from its ministers or members. The God "in whom we live and move and have our being" is beyond all definition. It does not refuse membership to men and women who could not say whether they believed in a personal God or not, whether they believed in a personal immortality or not. It asks no theological questions of those who wish to join its communion. But, essentially, the thought of God which is implicit in such a Free Church is that expressed in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. This belief in God and in man's divine nature is the greatest of all affirmations, in a sense, much more difficult and, at the same time, much more natural and necessary than belief in the Deity of Christ or in the sacrifice of the Mass.

Such a Church cannot expect Atheists, Materialists, Pessimists, or dogmatic Agnostics to join its ranks. It can, indeed, appeal to them and discuss with them far more sympathetically than other orthodox Churches. It does not treat them as sinners because of their unbelief. It respects all honest, sincere thought. It realizes that men often believe more than they think that they believe. It meets them on the common ground of human reason and conscience. It does not demand allegiance to any authority other than the best and highest in human nature. It believes in the divinity of man, i.e. in the capacity of man to know and love the highest, in the capacity of man to live and die for great ideals; it believes in the words of Augustine, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart can find no rest until it finds rest in Thee".

This faith in God and man is not a shallow optimism: it is a deeply-founded faith which springs from the tragic experiences of sorrow and pain and death, not less than from the experiences of happiness and beauty and love.

But we are not concerned with the question of justifying such a free religion, which is based on reason and conscience and the deepest experiences of the soul. All that is claimed here is that there are many who have this religion, and many more who are looking for such a religion. The great mass of men outside the Churches have some vague belief in God. Few of them are satisfied with blank negation and utter disbelief. Life and death, love and sorrow, the claims of duties and ideals, mean something to them; they feel "that they are greater than they know". They are dimly aware of a meaning in life, of something beyond themselves, of the need in their natures to give themselves without thought of happiness to an ideal.

These persons have completely broken with orthodoxy. They do not believe in the infallibility of Church or Bible, or that Jesus was born miraculously, or that he is the second Person in the Trinity, or that his death has saved them from their sins. Some of them, in despair of their ignorance and hating their solitude, join the Roman Catholic Church, which is the most august, the most logical, and the most powerful, authoritative, and venerable of all systems of orthodoxy. But for the most part, there is no likelihood of any return to orthodoxy for the great numbers of thinking and unthinking men and women who have left its fold.

The Church usually called Unitarian stands in a unique position towards them. It stands, simply, for a belief in a living God, and for the implications which are involved in such a belief. These implications are negative as well as positive. Such a belief in God implies that it is not contingent on a particular view of Church or Bible. It implies that it is not dependent on the authority of Church or Bible. It sees God in History, and supremely in the greatest events and sublimest characters in History, but it would still believe in God if it could be proved that some of the characters it has reverenced were unworthy or fictitious. Such a Church involves a denial of religion as based on miracles and on a supernatural revelation. It is not an aggressive Church, it does not love controversy. It recognizes that all who believe in God and try to follow Jesus have the root of the matter in them. It does not differ from other Churches so much in *what* it believes as in *why* it believes.

It sees in all orthodox doctrines an aspect of truth, it feels that they are imperfect expressions of divine reality. It can respect even such a doctrine as eternal punishment. It implies the awful and tremendous dis-

tinction between right and wrong. It implies also the greatness of man and his value in the sight of God. It implies that man's life is not unimportant, but of infinite consequence to himself, to his neighbour, and to God. The Incarnation is a symbol of the divine in the human, of the revelation of God in all self-sacrifice and love. The Atonement is a symbol of Redemption. The better must suffer and die for the worse, the stronger for the weaker, the wiser for the more foolish. It is the doctrine which contradicts most definitely the materialism which asserts that the weakest must go to the wall. It is not content with a condescending benevolence which gives of its superfluities. The world is not redeemed by comfortable people making others less uncomfortable without lessening their own comfort, or strong people making others stronger without injuring their own strength, or good people making others better without affecting their own security and peace. The death of Jesus on the cross is the type and expression of all true redemption.

It is on such lines as these that liberal Christianity interprets orthodox doctrines. It is not a new religion: it is not a controversial religion: it is a comprehensive religion. It has no quarrel with any form of sincere religious faith. It is in the basis of its faith rather than in the matter of its faith through which it holds a distinctive position. It objects to Creeds because they imply finality, because they interfere with the free working of the mind in its search for truth, and because they encourage unveracity. If Church and Bible are ultimate authorities, if all has been revealed once and for ever, Creeds are not merely permissible, but desirable. If, on the other hand, religion is founded on human nature, if man is so constituted that he can of himself

know something of God, if we are called "to feel after Him and find Him because He is not far from each one of us", then there is no finality, no fixity: it is a progressive Revelation, and religion cannot be concluded in a dogma which it is the duty of all men to accept.

This Church of the free Spirit, critical and yet reverent, unbound by Creeds and yet holding fast its faith in God, wide in its sympathies and yet firm in its convictions, is the ideal in which Unitarians believe. Their own Churches may be, and no doubt are, most inadequate and feeble representatives of that ideal, but it is the ideal they love, believe in, and strive to realize.

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